

# EIGHT ONE-ACT PLAYS



BY

GEORGE CALDERON

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## EIGHT ONE-ACT PLAYS

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# EIGHT ONE-ACT PLAYS

BY  
GEORGE CALDERON



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ST MARTIN'S STREET  
MDCCCCXXII

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HIS FRIENDS



## NOTE

Two of the plays in this volume have been produced on the stage. “The Little Stone House” was given in London by the Stage Society (1911) and later at the Coronet and Court theatres, at the Repertory theatres of Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and elsewhere. “Geminæ” was given at the Little Theatre (1913). Most of the others were practically ready for publication at the time of the outbreak of the war, but parts of “The Lamp” existed only in the form of rough draft.

I must thank Messrs Sidgwick & Jackson for kindly allowing me to include “The Little Stone House” in the present volume.

KATHARINE CALDERON.

HAMPSTEAD, 1921.



## CONTENTS

|                                  | PAGE |
|----------------------------------|------|
| PEACE . . . . .                  | 11   |
| THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE . . . . . | 29   |
| DERELICTS . . . . .              | 61   |
| GEMINAE . . . . .                | 83   |
| PARKIN BROS. . . . .             | 99   |
| THE TWO TALISMANS . . . . .      | 117  |
| THE LAMP . . . . .               | 149  |
| LONGING . . . . .                | 169  |



# PEACE

*A Farce in One Act*

## CHARACTERS

SIR BLENNERHASSETT POSTLETHWAITE

A BURGLAR

A POLICEMAN

## PEACE

*Enter SIR BLENNERHASSETT POSTLETHWAITE in dressing-gown and night-cap, carrying a bedroom candle.*

POSTLETHWAITE. It's useless trying to sleep ; I'm too nervous and excited. Nervous, because I'm entirely alone in the flat ; no one to protect me ; my wife's away ; and excited, because to-morrow, to-morrow is the greatest day of my life. I'm going to be called upon to take the chair at the Meeting of the Peace Society. The Society of Universal Peace. No Army ; no Navy ; no more violence ; the reign of amity begins at last. They are going to present me with a cup. Here it is. My Secretary chose it. Very nice cup. I shall have to make a speech ; an impromptu. I have been the whole week trying to get it off by heart. My Secretary wrote it. Think of them there in their thousands, in their serried ranks applauding me. I shall have the wittiest answers ready in reply to all interruptions. My Secretary will do the interruptions. I should like to run through some of the most telling passages only there's no one to hear me. However, I'll try. I imagine that an

audience sits before me, a large and intelligent audience. It's a great effort, but I'll try to imagine it. Ahem!—

Ladies and Gentlemen,—Five minutes ago I assure you I had not the faintest idea of what was before me. This elevated position is one for which I was totally unprepared. Then as if by chance I shall lay my hand on the case of exhibits which I am giving to the Society: relies of barbarism: weapons of the past. Ladies and Gentlemen (*Holding up the revolver*),—In the fifteenth century the gun replaced the bow and arrow. There was to have been a gun, but it was too long for the case. But in the twentieth the olive branch (Exhibit No. 15) has replaced the gun. Progress marches before us with the Lamp of Learning in one hand (*Holding up the candle*) and the Cap of Liberty in the other (*Holding up the night-cap*). Although we wish for peace Englishmen are not afraid. Their noble bosoms do not harbour such miserable sentiments as those of fear. (*Noise at the window; BURGLAR knocks over something*) Gracious goodness! What was that? (*Seizing revolver*) Somebody attacking the house! Infernal miscreants! It was like them to choose the moment when my wife was away. (*Blows out the candle and hides*)

*Enter BURGLAR by window and pulls up ladder after him which he leans against the high bookcase.*

BURGLAR. I'd best pull the ladder up after me. Somebody might see it from the outside. Now let's see what we have here. Ha ! That'll be the plate chest ! (Seeing POSTLETHWAITE) Good Lord ! What's that ? A man ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Yes, I'm a man, what are you ?

BURGLAR. Can't you see ? I'm a burglar.

POSTLETHWAITE. A burglar ! O Lord ! (Aside) And my wife's away. . . . Get away ! Get away from here or I'll shoot you.

BURGLAR. Lord ! He's armed. (Runs away, puts lamp on low revolving bookcase and hides) Now then, fire away. I'm not afraid. (POSTLETHWAITE fires three shots and the lamp falls) Ow ! You've killed me !

POSTLETHWAITE. Killed you ! Are you sure ? (Turns up electric light and walks over to BURGLAR) Where did I hit you ?

BURGLAR. Right through the . . . through the . . . come closer . . . right through the wick. (Seizing POSTLETHWAITE and taking the pistol from him) You Juggins ! You didn't suppose I was holding the lamp, did you ? Now then it's my turn. . . . Jump, you beggar, jump . . . (Fires twice at POSTLETHWAITE's feet) (POSTLETHWAITE jumps and runs up ladder on to the top of the bookshelf)

POSTLETHWAITE. (*Looking over*) Pax !

BURGLAR. That's all very well. You shot at me first.

POSTLETHWAITE. I was within the law. You put me in fear of my life.

BURGLAR. What about me, then ?

POSTLETHWAITE. You're only a burglar ; I'm a respectable householder.

BURGLAR. Well, I'm not blood-thirsty, I'm only cautious . . . cautious . . . (*Moving ladder*) Now you stay up there, Mr Respectable Householder, while I go through your things and see what's worth keeping.

POSTLETHWAITE. Aren't you ashamed of yourself to come to another person's house in the middle of the night and put him in fear of his life ?

BURGLAR. I didn't come here to put you in fear of your life. I simply came for the stuff. I never wanted this fracas. You ought to have been in bed at this time of night. I like people to be regular. Were you lying in wait for me ? Did you know I was coming ?

POSTLETHWAITE. No ; if I had I shouldn't have been here at all, I should have gone out.

BURGLAR. Then what were you doing ?

POSTLETHWAITE. I was preparing my speech for to-morrow.

BURGLAR. Speech ! Are you going to make a speech to-morrow ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Yes ; would you like to hear it ? I was wanting an audience. "Ladies and Gentlemen,—Five minutes ago I assure you I had not the faintest idea of what was before me . . ."

BURGLAR. I dare say not.

POSTLETHWAITE. "This elevated position is one for which I was totally unprepared. . . ."

BURGLAR. Stop or I'll shoot you !

POSTLETHWAITE. But you don't know what my speech is about yet.

BURGLAR. I don't want to, an idea has occurred to me. I'm going to make a speech myself.

POSTLETHWAITE. What, do *you* make speeches ?

BURGLAR. No, never ; there's the trouble. I'm a member of the Walworth Parliament.

POSTLETHWAITE. You ! But I thought you were a burglar.

BURGLAR. So I am at night, but what do you suppose I do all day ? Do you imagine we have no private life ? We meet every Saturday night.

POSTLETHWAITE. But Saturday night isn't in the day-time. You ought to be burgling on Saturday night. I like people to be regular.

BURGLAR. You show your ignorance, Sir, we're not allowed to burgle on Saturday nights.

POSTLETHWAITE. Who by, the police ?

BURGLAR. No, trade union.

POSTLETHWAITE. What, do burglars have a trade union ?

BURGLAR. Naturally ; we must have someone to protect us. Saturday night is our day off.

POSTLETHWAITE. But a night can't be a day.

BURGLAR. Silence, Sir ! I'm going to make a speech.

POSTLETHWAITE. But this isn't the time or the place ; if you've come here to burgle—burgle. You're keeping me in suspense.

BURGLAR. I shall choose my own time and place for speaking.

POSTLETHWAITE. Why not choose Saturday night in Walworth ?

BURGLAR. Because I can't. I don't know how it is, but somehow I can never catch the Speaker's eye. This is the first time I have ever got my audience, so to speak, in hand. "Semper ego auditur tantum num quamque reponam."

POSTLETHWAITE. No Latin quotations, Sir, I beg. It's old-fashioned.

BURGLAR. I'm an old-fashioned man, I shall do what I like. "Honi soit qui mal y pense," Mr Speaker, Sir. . . .

POSTLETHWAITE. What is it on ? Politics ?

BURGLAR. Of course ; I'm a strong Imperialist.

POSTLETHWAITE. O Lord, I might have guessed it ! The party of violence.

BURGLAR. What's that you say ?

---

POSTLETHWAITE. I was only talking to myself.

BURGLAR. No asides, they're old-fashioned. I expect assent and applause, do you understand ? What I need is help and encouragement.

POSTLETHWAITE. I suppose I'd better humour him. . . . Hear, hear !

BURGLAR. What is Society founded on ?

POSTLETHWAITE. On love.

BURGLAR. On violence.

POSTLETHWAITE. On love.

BURGLAR. On violence. Don't interrupt me.

POSTLETHWAITE. But you asked me a question.

BURGLAR. The question was rhetorical and didn't require an answer. Who made the poor poor and the rich rich ? (*Bis*) Why don't you answer ?

POSTLETHWAITE. I thought your question was rhetorical and did not need an answer.

BURGLAR. Don't prevaricate, but answer me at once. Who made the rich rich ?

POSTLETHWAITE. The which which ?

BURGLAR. Who made the rich rich ?

POSTLETHWAITE. The rich.

BURGLAR. You're wrong, the poor made the rich rich. How ?

POSTLETHWAITE. By violence.

BURGLAR. No, Sir ; by industry. And who made the poor poor ?

POSTLETHWAITE. The poor.

BURGLAR. Wrong again ; it was the rich made the poor poor.

POSTLETHWAITE. Poor poor !

BURGLAR. How did the rich make the poor poor ?

POSTLETHWAITE. By industry.

BURGLAR. Wrong again. By violence. How is this to be righted ? How are we to make the rich poor and the poor rich ?

POSTLETHWAITE. By industry.

BURGLAR. No, Sir ; by violence. And if the poor man comes to the rich man to make himself rich, and the rich man poor, how does the rich man meet him ?

POSTLETHWAITE. By v—v—v—

BURGLAR. That's right.

POSTLETHWAITE. By violence.

BURGLAR. And if one nation comes against another nation, how must the nation meet the nation ?

POSTLETHWAITE. By violence.

BURGLAR. Come, I want a little more enthusiasm ; say it again.

POSTLETHWAITE. By violence.

BURGLAR. That's right. And how is England to be ready to repel violence with violence ?

By having a strong army and a strong navy.

Loud applause.

POSTLETHWAITE. Ha ! ha ! Hear ! hear !

BURGLAR. Come, I'm glad to find that we're

both of the same way of thinking. When the Germans take up arms, what must we do ?

POSTLETHWAITE. We must take up arms.

BURGLAR. And when the Germans lay down a new keel, what must we do ?

POSTLETHWAITE. We must lay down our arms.

BURGLAR. Look here, Mr Speaker, I don't know if you're fooling me . . .

POSTLETHWAITE. No, no ; I'm nervous, that's all. You're so quick I can't get the right answer ready.

BURGLAR. I've had two shots at you already.

POSTLETHWAITE. How many shots did you say ?

BURGLAR. Two.

POSTLETHWAITE. And how many did I have at you ?

BURGLAR. You ? Three.

POSTLETHWAITE. Let's see ; two and three is five. You're quite sure it was two ?

BURGLAR. Quite. I still owe you one.

POSTLETHWAITE. Well, you'll have to go on owing it because there aren't any more cartridges. There were only five to start with. I counted 'em.

BURGLAR. We'll soon see about that. (*Click*)

POSTLETHWAITE. Yah !

BURGLAR. I don't care, I'm going on with my speech.

POSTLETHWAITE. I won't listen to you.

BURGLAR. You won't, won't you ? There, take that ! (*Firing arrow which sticks into the wall*)

POSTLETHWAITE. Yah ! There's only one arrow.

BURGLAR. Gentlemen, Carthago est delenda.

POSTLETHWAITE. No Latin.

BURGLAR. "Si pacem vis para bellum."

POSTLETHWAITE. Ireland for ever !

BURGLAR. "Primus inter pares."

POSTLETHWAITE. Votes for Women ! Votes for Women ! Votes for Women !

BURGLAR. Very well, if you won't listen I shall just go on with what I came for. What's this ?

POSTLETHWAITE. That's a work-box.

BURGLAR. Yours ?

POSTLETHWAITE. No, my wife's.

BURGLAR. Good Lord, have you got a wife ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Rather.

BURGLAR. Why the devil didn't you say so before ?

POSTLETHWAITE. She's asleep, don't make such a noise.

BURGLAR. Where ? In there ?

POSTLETHWAITE. No ; in Cornwall.

BURGLAR. Old buffoon. (*He begins hunting for something in his tool bag*)

POSTLETHWAITE. O Lord, if I could only telephone to the police. (*Reaches down for the telephone*) I can't reach the damn thing.

BURGLAR. What are you doing ?

---

POSTLETHWAITE. Ju-jit-su! Swedish exercises ; pretending to pull up swedes. I must have something to keep me warm. (*Tries to loop the telephone up with the rope of his dressing-gown*)

BURGLAR. What are you doing ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Learning to fish. (*He pulls up the telephone and then the telephone book, which hangs by a long chain*) Now for the number of the Police Station.

BURGLAR. What are you doing ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Nothing.

BURGLAR. What is that book ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Bradshaw. I must have something to read. . . . Here we are. 2304 Mayfair ; 2304 Mayfair.

BURGLAR. What's that you're saying ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Nothing ; it's the time of the train. Saturdays only. Refreshment room, telegraph at the station. (*Exit BURGLAR to bedroom while he is talking*) Wrong number.

O Lord ! Send for the Supervisor. I shall write to *The Times*. Try again. Ho ! for the Lord's sake, come quick ; I'm all alone with a burglar in my flat. Is he armed ? Yes, he has got a pistol, my pistol. What's that you say ? The officer will be here in a quarter of an hour. But I don't want an officer, an ordinary private is good enough for me. I can't wait, he's murdering

me. What's that you say ? You like things done regular. Oh ! take your time. Don't be late for the inquest. Bring the undertaker and some mutes. O Lord, quarter of an hour, and I'm getting so cold and so dusty up here. I must speak to Mary about it. (*Re-enter BURGLAR wearing fur coat and top hat of wrong size and carrying dressing-bags, dressing-cases, etc.*) Have you got all you want ?

BURGLAR. Pretty well, now, I think. (*Helping himself to a whisky and soda*)

POSTLETHWAITE. Sure there's nothing else ? Got my mother-o'-pearl studs and the hair-brushes, and the nail-brushes, and the tooth-brush ? Then you'd better be going.

BURGLAR. Oh, there's no hurry.

POSTLETHWAITE. (*Looking at his watch*) But there is. I've telephoned for the police.

BURGLAR. You've telephoned for the police ! You scoundrel ! (*Pointing pistol at him*)

POSTLETHWAITE. Scoundrel yourself. (*Pointing telephone at him*) Bang !

BURGLAR. Come down and have it out like a man.

POSTLETHWAITE. No, thanks, I prefer to stay up here.

BURGLAR. Where's the door ?

POSTLETHWAITE. That's it, that square thing in the wall.

BURGLAR. No, I might meet them on the stairs.  
I'll go by the window.

POSTLETHWAITE. You might meet them in the street.

BURGLAR. Well, I'll go one way or the other.  
Hullo ! What's that ?

POSTLETHWAITE. That's my cup.

BURGLAR. "Presented to Sir Blennerhassett Postlethwaite." How did you come by this ?  
Now come, don't prevaricate. Do you know Sir Blennerhassett ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Know Sir Blennerhassett !  
I am Sir Blennerhassett.

BURGLAR. The M.P. ?

POSTLETHWAITE. The M.P.

BURGLAR. The famous one ?

POSTLETHWAITE. O Sir !

BURGLAR. The notorious blatherskite who preaches universal peace ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Haven't I been preaching it for the last half-hour ?

BURGLAR. And the police are coming ?

POSTLETHWAITE. Yes, you'd better be off.

BURGLAR. No, on second thoughts I'll stay.

POSTLETHWAITE. But I shall give you in charge.

BURGLAR. No, you won't ; you daren't.

POSTLETHWAITE. I daren't !

BURGLAR. Because I shall ruin your reputation.

POSTLETHWAITE. How ?

BURGLAR. Because I shall tell the magistrate how you received me with a pistol.

POSTLETHWAITE. He won't care.

BURGLAR. But the public will. I shall make a speech.

POSTLETHWAITE. Another?

BURGLAR. In court; the papers will be full of it. By the time you get up at your blessed meeting it'll be in all the evening papers.

POSTLETHWAITE. But the meeting's in the afternoon.

BURGLAR. But the evening papers come out in the morning.

POSTLETHWAITE. But it's all right, you can go; the police won't be here for another ten minutes. I won't open the door till you're gone.

BURGLAR. But I refuse to go.

POSTLETHWAITE. You can keep your swag, I don't want it.

BURGLAR. This isn't enough.

POSTLETHWAITE. What more do you want?

BURGLAR. A cheque.

POSTLETHWAITE. Let me down then. (BURGLAR *brings ladder*) How much?

BURGLAR. A thousand pounds.

POSTLETHWAITE. I can't do it.

BURGLAR. You must.

POSTLETHWAITE. Where's my cheque-book? Who am I to make it out to?

BURGLAR. It's not for me. (*Grandiloquently*)  
It's for the Navy League.

POSTLETHWAITE. The Navy League! I can't  
do it.

BURGLAR. You must. (POSTLETHWAITE *signs  
cheque*)

POSTLETHWAITE. O Lord, there are the police  
banging at the door. They'll break it in.  
Get out by the window.

BURGLAR. Not at all, I mean to go like a gentle-  
man.

POSTLETHWAITE. If they find you here I shan't  
know what to say!

BURGLAR. Say I'm a friend of yours.

POSTLETHWAITE. I can't.

BURGLAR. You must. Open the door. (POSTLE-  
THWAITE *opens the door*)

POLICEMAN. Good-evening, Sir, you sent for me,  
I think.

POSTLETHWAITE. Did I?

POLICEMAN. Did you! Don't you know if you  
did?

POSTLETHWAITE. Oh yes, I remember, I—I—  
I— This is a friend of mine.

POLICEMAN. (To BURGLAR) Good-evening, Sir.  
I think I know your face.

BURGLAR. Oh dear, yes, lots of people know my  
face. This gentleman rang you up. . . .

POLICEMAN. What's the charge?

BURGLAR. Oh dear, no, no charge; entrance free.

POLICEMAN. (*To Postlethwaite*) What did you want me for ?

POSTLETHWAITE. This gentleman was going away, and I rang you up . . . to ask if you'd mind calling a taxi for him.

POLICEMAN. A taxi !

POSTLETHWAITE. Yes. The fact is we've lost our whistle. And if you want a drink here's a quid for you.

POLICEMAN. Very good, Sir. (*Turning to Burglar and picking up dressing-case*) Is this yours ?

BURGLAR. Yes, it's mine. It was his but it is mine. It's sometimes his and sometimes mine. Perhaps you wouldn't mind carrying it down to the cab for me.

POLICEMAN. No more luggage, Sir ?

[*Exit Policeman*

BURGLAR. Why, bless my soul, I was nearly forgetting . . . my christening cup ! (*Taking up the silver cup*) Good-bye, old chap, I'll look in again some time. Don't be cast down ; whatever you have done this evening has been done for the sake of peace.

POSTLETHWAITE. Scoundrel ! Tell me your name that I may curse you !

BURGLAR. Oh, my name's Peace, Charlie Peace.

CURTAIN

# THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

*Stage Society, 1911*

|  |         |                     |
|--|---------|---------------------|
| PRASKÓVYA, <i>a lodging-house keeper</i> | · · · · | MRS SABA RALEIGH    |
| VARVÁRA, <i>her servant</i>              | · · · · | MISS EILY MALLYON   |
| ASTÉRYI, <i>a lodger</i>                 | · · · · | MR FRANKLIN DYALL   |
| FOMÁ, <i>a lodger</i>                    | · · · · | MR STEPHEN T. EWART |
| SPIRIDON, <i>a stonemason</i>            | · · · · | MR LEON M. LION     |
| A STRANGER                               | · · · · | MR O. P. HEGGIE     |
| A CORPORAL                               | · · · · | MR E. CRESFAN       |

Produced by MR KENELM FOSS

*The scene is laid in a small provincial town in Russia*

*The play is founded on a story by the same author, published anonymously some years ago in "Temple Bar."*

## THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE

PRASKÓVYA's sitting-room. Street door in porch and a curtainless window at the back. It is night ; the light of an oil-lamp in the street dimly shows snow-covered houses and falling snow. The room is plainly furnished : a bed, a curtain on a cord, some books, eikons on a shelf in the corner with a wick in a red glass bowl burning before them, paper flowers and Easter eggs on strings. A photograph of a man of twenty hangs by the eikons. There are doors to kitchen and to the lodgers' rooms.

VARVÁRA is discovered sitting by a lamp darning stockings.

There is an atmosphere of silence, solitude and Russian monotony. The clock ticks. A man is seen passing in the street ; his feet make no sound on the snowy ground. There is the sound of a concertina and a man who laughs in the distance out of doors. Then silence again.

Enter ASTÉRYI, stout and lazy ; grey hair thrown untidily back, a rough beard. He is in slippers and dirty dressing-gown, with a big case full of Russian cigarettes in his pocket.

ASTÉRYI. Is Praskóvya Petróvna not at home ?

VARVÁRA. (Rising) She is not at home, Astéryi Ivanovitch. She has gone to Vespers at St Pantaléimon's in the Marsh. It is the festival

of the translation of St Pantaléimon's relics.  
(VARVÁRA *sits again*. ASTÉRYI *walks to and fro smoking a cigarette*) Will you not have your game of patience as usual ?

ASTÉRYI. Without Praskóvya Petróvna ?

VARVÁRA. She would be sorry if you missed your game because she was late. You can play again when she returns ; she likes to watch you.

ASTÉRYI. Very well. (VARVÁRA *gets a pack of cards*. ASTÉRYI *sits at a table at one side and plays*)

VARVÁRA. Shall I prepare the samovar ?

ASTÉRYI. Not yet ; I will wait. How greasy these cards are. (*Laying out a patience*)

VARVÁRA. No wonder, Astéryi Ivanovitch. It is two years since you bought this pack.

A VOICE. (*Without*) Varvára ! Varvára ! There is no water in my jug.

ASTÉRYI. There is one of the lodgers calling you.

VARVÁRA. It is the schoolmaster.

ASTÉRYI. Better not keep him waiting ; he is an angry man.

VARVÁRA. I will go. Excuse me, please.

[*Exit VARVÁRA*. *The clock ticks again*. ASTÉRYI *pauses and meditates, then murmurs*, "Oh, Hóspodi !" *as if in surprise at being so terribly bored*. *The concertina plays a few notes*. *A knock at the street door*.]

ASTÉRYI. Who's there ? Come in, come in !

*Enter SPIRIDÓN, a man with a cringing, crafty manner, in a sheepskin coat with snow on it. He stands by the door, facing the eikon, crossing himself with large gestures and bowing very low towards it.*

SPIRIDÓN. (*Looking round*) Good-day, sir, good-day. (*Crossing himself again*) May the holy saints preserve all in this house.

ASTÉRYI. Ah ! it's you, Spiridón ?

SPIRIDÓN. Yes, sir. It is Spiridón the stone-mason.

ASTÉRYI. What brings you here, Spiridón ?

SPIRIDÓN. Is Praskóvia Petróvna not at home ?

ASTÉRYI. No, she has gone to Vespers at St Pantaléimon's in the Marsh.

SPIRIDÓN. The service is late to-night.

ASTÉRYI. Yes. . . . You are a hard man, Spiridón.

SPIRIDÓN. Me, sir !

ASTÉRYI. And you lose money by your hardness. Praskóvia Petróvna is a poor woman. For years she has been saving up money to build a stone house over the grave of her son in the Tróitski Cemetery. You say that you will build it for 500 roubles, but you ask too much. By starving herself and pinching in every way she has saved up 400 roubles at last, and if you were a wise man you would accept it. For see, she is old ; if she starve herself to save up another 100 roubles she will

be dead before she has got it ; her money will be sent back to her village, or it will go into the pocket of some officials, and you will not have the tomb-house to build at all.

SPIRIDÓN. I have thought of all these things, Astéryi Ivanovitch, since you last spoke to me about it. And I said to myself : Astéryi Ivanovitch is perhaps right ; it is not only Praskóvya Petróvna who is old ; I myself am old also, and may die before she has saved up money enough. But it is very hard to work and be underpaid. Good Valdai stone is expensive and hard to cut, and workmen nowadays ask for unholy wages. Still, I said to myself, a tomb-house for her son—it is a God-fearing work : and I have resolved to make the sacrifice. I have come to tell her I will consent to build it for 400 roubles.

ASTÉRYI. You have done rightly. You are an honest man, and God and St Nicholas will perhaps save your soul.

*Enter FOMÁ in cap and great-coat from the door to the lodgers' room.*

FOMÁ. Good-evening, Astéryi Ivanovitch. Is Praskóvya not at home ?

ASTÉRYI. No, she is at Vespers.

FOMÁ. I come in and find my stove smoking. (*Taking off his coat*) I wished to ask her permission to sit here awhile to escape a headache. Who is this ? Ah, Spiridón. And by

what miracle does Astéryi Ivanoviteh hope that God and St Nicholas will save your soul ?

ASTÉRYI. He has consented to build Praskóvya Petróvna the tomb-house over Sasha's grave for 400 roubles instead of 500.

FOMÁ. That is good ! She will be glad to hear the news, and shake hands on the bargain, and christen the earnest-money with vodka.

SPIRIDÓN. The earnest-money ? Ah no, sir, there can be no earnest-money. The whole sum of money must be paid at once. I am a poor man. I must pay the quarryman for the stone ; my workmen cannot live on air.

ASTÉRYI. If she has the money she will pay you.

FOMÁ. Well, if there is to be no earnest-money, at least we will have the vodka. Vodka is always good.

ASTÉRYI. (To SPIRIDÓN) Sit down and wait till she returns. She will not be long.

SPIRIDÓN. No, no ; I will come again in an hour. I have to go to my brother-in-law two streets away. (*Crossing himself before the eikons*) I will come again as I return. (*The tap of drums in the street*)

ASTÉRYI. Why are they beating drums ?

FOMÁ. It is a patrol passing.

SPIRIDÓN. The soldiers are very watchful to-day.

FOMÁ. It is because the Empress comes this way to-morrow on her journey to Smolensk.

SPIRIDÓN. They have arrested many suspicious

people. All those who have no passports are being sent away to Siberia.

FOMÁ. Ah! poor creatures! (*A patrol of soldiers passes the window quietly*)

SPIRIDÓN. Why should you say "poor creatures"? If they were honest men they would not be without passports. Good-evening.

FOMÁ. Wait till they have gone.

SPIRIDÓN. We honest men have nothing to fear from them. Good-evening. I will return again in an hour. [Exit SPIRIDÓN

FOMÁ. How glad Praskóvia will be!

ASTÉRYI. Say nothing of this to anyone. We will keep it as a surprise.

*Enter VARVÁRA*

FOMÁ. Varvára, my pretty child, fetch the bottle of vodka from my room.

VARVÁRA. Vodka in here? Praskóvia Petróvna will be angry.

FOMÁ. No, she will not be angry; she will be glad. (Exit VARVÁRA) Do you play patience here every night?

ASTÉRYI. Every night for more than twenty years.

FOMÁ. What is it called?

ASTÉRYI. It is called the Wolf!

FOMÁ. Does it ever come out?

ASTÉRYI. It has come out twice. The first time I found a purse in the street which somebody had lost. The second time the man

above me at the office died and I got his place.

FOMÁ. It brings good luck then ?

ASTÉRYI. To me, at least.

FOMÁ. How glad Praskóvia Petróvna will be !

*Enter VARVÁRA with vodka bottle, which she sets on a table ; no one drinks from it yet.*

VARVÁRA. Do you not want to drink tea ?

FOMÁ. Very much, you rogue.

VARVÁRA. Then I will set the samovar for both of you in here. (*She gets out tumblers, lemon and sugar*)

ASTÉRYI. I did wrong in moving the seven.

FOMÁ. Put it back then.

ASTÉRYI. It is too late. Once it has been moved it must not be put back.

*Enter PRASKÓVYA from the street hurriedly with a lantern.*

PRASKÓVYA. (*Crossing herself*) Hóspodi Bózhe. moy !

VARVÁRA. (*Running to her, frightened*) Have you seen him again ?

PRASKÓVYA. (*Agitated*) I do not know. There seemed to be men standing everywhere in the shadows. . . . Good-evening, Fomá Ilyitch, good-evening, Astéryi Ivanovitch.

[VARVÁRA goes out and brings in the samovar.

FOMÁ. I have been making myself at home ; my stove smoked.

PRASKÓVYA. Sit down, sit down ! What cere-

mony ! Why should you not be here ? And vodka too ? What is the vodka for ?

ASTÉRYI. I will tell you when I have finished my patience. (*They all drink tea*)

PRASKÓVYA. So you are playing already.

ASTÉRYI. If it comes out, the good luck that it brings shall be for you !

PRASKÓVYA. For me ? (*They all watch ASTÉRYI playing*) The knave goes on the queen. (*A pause*)

FOMÁ. That is unfortunate.

VARVÁRA. You should not have moved the ten. (*A pause*)

ASTÉRYI. That will be better. (*A pause*)

PRASKÓVYA. How brightly the eikon lamp burns before the portrait of my boy.

VARVÁRA. It does indeed.

PRASKÓVYA. It is the new fire from the Candlemas taper.

FOMÁ. It is the new oil that makes it burn brightly.

PRASKÓVYA. (*Crossing herself*) Nonsense ! it is the new fire.

FOMÁ. Did ever one hear such stuff ? She put out the lamp at Candlemas and lighted it anew from the taper which she brought home from the midnight service, from the new fire struck by the priest with flint and steel ; and now she thinks that is the reason why it burns so brightly.

VARVÁRA. Is that not so, then, Astéryi Ivano-vitech ?

ASTÉRYI. Oh, Fomá Ilyitch is a chemist ; he can tell you what fire is made of.

FOMÁ. So you have been all the way to St Pantaléimon's in the Marsh ? Oh, piety, thy name is Praskóvya Petrónva ! Not a person can hold the most miserable little service in the remotest corner of the town but you smell it out and go to it.

VARVÁRA. It is a Christian deed, Fomá Ilyitch.

ASTÉRYI. Now I can get at the ace.

VARVÁRA. (To PRASKÓVYA) I must get your supper. (*She gets a plate of meat from a cupboard*)

FOMÁ. And on All Souls' Day she brought home holy water in a bottle and sprinkled the rooms of all the lodgers. The schoolmaster was very angry. You spotted the cover of his Greek Lexicon. He says it is a pagan custom come down to us from the ancient Scythians.

PRASKÓVYA. I do not like to hear jokes about sacred things. One may provoke Heaven to anger.

ASTÉRYI. Now I get all this row off.

FOMÁ. You are always afraid of offending Heaven.

PRASKÓVYA. Of course I am. Think what I have at stake. For you it is only a little thing. You have a life of your own on earth ;

I have none. I have been as good as dead for twenty years, and the only thing that I desire is to get safely to heaven to join my son who is there.

FOMÁ. We all wish to get to heaven.

PRASKÓVYA. Not so much as I do. If I were in hell it is not the brimstone that would matter; it would be to know that I should not see my son. (FOMÁ nods)

ASTÉRYI. I believe it is coming out. (*They all concentrate their attention eagerly on the patience*)

VARVÁRA. The six and the seven go. Saints preserve us! and the eight. (*She takes up a card to move it*)

ASTÉRYI. No, not that one; leave that.

VARVÁRA. Where did it come from?

ASTÉRYI. From here.

PRASKÓVYA. No, from there.

VARVÁRA. It was from here.

ASTÉRYI. It is all the same.

FOMÁ. It will go.

PRASKÓVYA. And the knave from off this row.

VARVÁRA. The Wolf is going out!

PRASKÓVYA. It is seven years since it went out.

FOMÁ. Seven years?

ASTÉRYI. It is out!

PRASKÓVYA. It is done!

VARVÁRA. (*Clapping her hands*) Hooray !

ASTÉRYI. (*Elated*) Some great good fortune is going to happen.

VARVÁRA. What can it be ? (*A pause*)

PRASKÓVYA. And what is the vodka for ?

ASTÉRYI. The vodka ?

PRASKÓVYA. You promised to tell me when the patience was done.

ASTÉRYI. How much money have you saved up for the house on Sasha's tomb ?

PRASKÓVYA. Four hundred and six roubles and a few kopecks.

ASTÉRYI. And Spiridón asks for 500 roubles ?

PRASKÓVYA. Five hundred roubles.

ASTÉRYI. What if he should lower his price ?

PRASKÓVYA. He will not lower his price.

ASTÉRYI. What if he should say that he would take 450 roubles ?

PRASKÓVYA. Why, if I went without food for a year . . . (*Laughing at herself*) If one could but live without food !

ASTÉRYI. What if he should say that he would take 420 roubles ?

PRASKÓVYA. Astéryi Ivanovitch, you know the proverb—the elbow is near, but you cannot bite it. I am old and feeble. I want it now, now, now. Shall I outlive the bitter winter ? A shelter to sit in and talk to my son. A monument worthy of such a saint.

ASTÉRYI. Spiridón has been here.

PRASKÓVYA. Spiridón has been here ? What did he say ? Tell me !

ASTÉRYI. He will build it for 400 roubles.

VARVÁRA. For 400 roubles !

ASTÉRYI. He will return soon to strike a bargain.

PRASKÓVYA. Is it true ?

ASTÉRYI. As true as that I wear the cross.

PRASKÓVYA. Oh, all the holy saints be praised !

Sláva Tebyé Hóspodi ! (*Kneeling before the eikons*) Oh, my darling Sasha, we will meet in a fine house, you and I, face to face. (*She prostrates herself three times before the eikons*)

VARVÁRA. Then this is the good luck.

ASTÉRYI. No, this cannot be what the cards told us ; for this had happened already before the Wolf came out.

VARVÁRA. Then there is something else to follow ?

ASTÉRYI. Evidently.

VARVÁRA. What can it be ?

ASTÉRYI. To-morrow perhaps we shall know.

PRASKÓVYA. (*Rising*) And in a month I shall have my tomb-house finished, for which I have been waiting twenty years ! A little stone house safe against the rain. (*Smiling and eager*) There will be a tile stove which I can light : in the middle a stone table and two chairs—one for me and one for my boy when he comes and sits with me, and . . .

VARVÁRA. (*At the window, shrieking*) Ah!  
Heaven defend us!

PRASKÓVYA. What is it?

VARVÁRA. The face! the face!

PRASKÓVYA. The face again?

FOMÁ. What face?

VARVÁRA. The face looked in at the window!

ASTÉRYI. Whose face?

VARVÁRA. It is the man that we have seen  
watching us in the cemetery.

PRASKÓVYA. (*Crossing herself*) Oh, Heaven  
preserve me from this man!

FOMÁ. (*Opening the street door*) There is  
nobody there.

ASTÉRYI. This is a false alarm.

FOMÁ. People who tire their eyes by staring at  
window-panes at night often see faces look-  
ing in through them.

PRASKÓVYA. Oh, Hóspodi!

ASTÉRYI. Spiridón will be returning soon.  
Have you the money ready?

PRASKÓVYA. The money? Yes, yes! I will  
get it ready. It is not here. Come, Varvára.  
(*They put on coats and shawls*)

ASTÉRYI. If it is in the bank we must wait till  
the day-time.

PRASKÓVYA. My money in the bank? I am  
not so foolish. (*She lights the lantern*) Get  
the spade, Varvára. (VARVÁRA *goes out*  
*and fetches a spade*) It is buried in the

field, in a place that no one knows but myself.

ASTÉRYI. Are you not afraid to go out?

PRASKÓVYA. Afraid? No, I am not afraid.

FOMÁ. But your supper—you have not eaten your supper.

PRASKÓVYA. How can I think of supper at such a moment?

FOMÁ. No supper? Oh, what a wonderful thing is a mother's love!

PRASKÓVYA. (To ASTÉRYI and FOMÁ) Stay here till we return.

VARVÁRA. (Drawing back) I am afraid, Praskóvya Petróvna.

PRASKÓVYA. Nonsense, there is nothing to fear.

FOMÁ. (Throwing his coat over his back) I will go with you to the corner of the street.

ASTÉRYI. (Shuffling the cards) I must try one for myself.

FOMÁ. (Mockingly) What's the use? It will never come out.

ASTÉRYI. (Cheerfully) Oh, it never does to be discouraged.

[*Exeunt* PRASKÓVYA, VARVÁRA and FOMÁ.

ASTÉRYI plays patience. Everything is silent and monotonous again. The clock ticks.

FOMÁ re-enters, dancing and singing roguishly to the tune of the Russian folk-song, “*Vo sadú li v ogoróde*” :

In the shade there walked a maid  
As fair as any flower,  
Picking posies all of roses  
For to deck her bower.

ASTÉRYI. Don't make such a noise.

FOMÁ. I can't help it. I'm gay. I have a sympathetic soul. I rejoice with Praskóvya Petróvna. I think she is mad, but I rejoice with her.

ASTÉRYI. So do I; but I don't disturb others on that account.

FOMÁ. Come, old grumbler, have a mouthful of vodka. (*Melodramatically*) A glass of wine with Cæsar Borgia !

(*Singing*) As she went adown the bent  
She met a merry fellow,  
He was drest in all his best  
In red and blue and yellow.

So he was a saint, was he, that son of hers ?  
Well, well, of what advantage is that ? Saints are not so easy to love as sinners. You and I are not saints, are we, Astéryi Ivanovitch ?

ASTÉRYI. I do not care to parade my halo in public.

FOMÁ. Oh, as for me, I keep mine in a box under the bed; it only frightens people. Do you think he would have remained a saint all this time if he had lived ?

ASTÉRYI. Who can say ?

FOMÁ. Nonsense ! He would have become like the rest of us. Then why make all this fuss about him ? Why go on for twenty years sacrificing her own life to a fantastic image ?

ASTÉRYI. Why not, if it pleases her to do so ?

FOMÁ. Say what you please, but all the same she is mad ; yes, Praskóvya is mad.

ASTÉRYI. We call everyone mad who is faithful to their ideas. If people think only of food and money and clothing we call them sane, but if they have ideas beyond those things we call them mad. I envy Praskóvya. Praskóvya has preserved in her old age what I myself have lost. I, too, had ideas once, but I have been unfaithful to them ; they have evaporated and vanished.

FOMÁ. What ideas were these ?

ASTÉRYI. Liberty ! Political regeneration !

FOMÁ. Ah yes ; you were a sad revolutionary once, I have been told.

ASTÉRYI. I worshipped Liberty, as Praskóvya worships her Sasha. But I have lived my ideals down in the dull routine of my foolish aimless life as an office hack, a clerk in the District Council, making copies that no one will ever see of documents that no one ever wants to read. . . . Suddenly there comes the Revolution ; there is fighting in the streets ; men raise the red flag ; blood flows.

I might go forth and strike a blow for that Liberty which I loved twenty years ago. But no, I have become indifferent. I do not care who wins, the Government or the Revolutionaries ; it is all the same to me.

FOMÁ. You are afraid. One gets timid as one gets older.

ASTÉRYI. Afraid ? No. What have I to be afraid of ? Death is surely not so much worse than life ? No, it is because my idea is dead and cannot be made to live again, while Praskóvya, whose routine as a lodging-house keeper is a hundred times duller than mine, is still faithful to her old idea. Let us not call her mad ; let us rather worship her as something holy, for her fidelity to an idea in this wretched little town where ideas are as rare as white ravens.

FOMÁ. Has she no friends to love ?

ASTÉRYI. She has never had any friends ; she needed none.

FOMÁ. She has relatives, I suppose ?

ASTÉRYI. None.

FOMÁ. What mystery explains this solitude ?

ASTÉRYI. If there is a mystery it is easily guessed. It is an everyday story ; the story of a peasant woman betrayed and deserted by a nobleman. She came with her child to this town ; and instead of sinking, set herself bravely to work, to win a living for the two

of them. She was young and strong then ; her work prospered with her.

FOMÁ. And her son was worthy of her love ?

ASTÉRYI. He was a fine boy—handsome and intelligent. By dint of the fiercest economy she got him a nobleman's education ; sent him to the Gymnase, and thence, when he was eighteen, to the University of Moscow. Praskóvya herself cannot read or write, but her boy . . . the books on that shelf are the prizes which he won. She thought him a pattern of all the virtues.

FOMÁ. Aha ! now we're coming to it ! So he was a sinner after all ?

ASTÉRYI. We are none of us perfect. His friends were ill-chosen. The hard-earned money that Praskóvya thought was spent on University expenses went on many other things—on drink, on women, and on gambling. But he did one good thing—he hid it all safely from his mother. I helped him in that. Together we kept her idea safe through a difficult period. And before he was twenty it was all over—he was dead.

FOMÁ. Yes, he was murdered by some foreigner, I know.

ASTÉRYI. By Adámek, a Pole.

FOMÁ. And what was the motive of the crime ?

ASTÉRYI. It was for money. By inquiries which I made after the trial I ascertained that

this Adámek was a bad character and an adventurer, who used to entice students to his rooms to drink and gamble with him. Sasha had become an intimate friend of his ; and it was even said that they were partners in cheating the rest. Anyhow, there is no doubt that at one time or another they had won considerable sums at cards, and disputed as to the ownership of them. The last thing that was heard of them, they bought a sledge with two horses and set out saying they were going to Tula. On the road Adámek murdered the unfortunate boy. The facts were all clear and indisputable. There was no need to search into the motives. The murderer fell straight into the hands of the police. The District Inspector, coming silently along the road in his sledge, suddenly saw before him the boy lying dead by the roadside, and the murderer standing over him with the knife in his hand. He arrested him at once ; there was no possibility of denying it.

FOMÁ. And it was quite clear that his victim was Sasha ?

ASTÉRYI. Quite clear. Adámek gave intimate details about him, such as only a friend of his could have known, which put his identity beyond a doubt. When the trial was over the body was sent in a coffin to Praskóvya Petróvna, who buried it here in the Tróitski Cemetery.

FOMÁ. And the Pole ?

ASTÉRYI. He was sent to penal servitude for life to the silver mines of Siberia.

FOMÁ. So Praskóvia is even madder than I thought. Her religion is founded on a myth. Her life is an absurd deception.

ASTÉRYI. No ; she has created something out of nothing ; that is all.

FOMÁ. In your place I should have told her the truth.

ASTÉRYI. No.

FOMÁ. Anything is better than a lie.

ASTÉRYI. There is no lie in it. Praskóvia's idea and Sasha's life are two independent things. A statement of fact may be true or false ; but an idea need only be clear and definite. That is all that matters. (*There is a tapping at the door ; the latch is lifted, and the STRANGER peeps in*) Come in, come in ! (*Enter the STRANGER, ragged and degraded. He looks about the room, dazed by the light, and fixes his attention on Astéryi*) Who are you ? What do you want ?

STRANGER. I came to speak to you.

ASTÉRYI. To speak to me ?

FOMÁ. Take off your cap. Do you not see the eikons ?

ASTÉRYI. What do you want with me ?

STRANGER. Only a word, Astéryi Ivanovitch.

ASTÉRYI. How have you learnt my name ?

FOMÁ. Do you know the man ?

ASTÉRYI. No.

STRANGER. You do not know me ?

ASTÉRYI. No.

STRANGER. Have you forgotten me, Astéryi Ivanovitch ?

ASTÉRYI. (*Almost speechless*) Sasha !

FOMÁ. What is it ? You look as if you had seen a ghost.

ASTÉRYI. A ghost ? There are no such things as ghosts. Would that it were a ghost. It is Sasha.

FOMÁ. Sasha ?

ASTÉRYI. It is Praskóvya's son alive.

FOMÁ. Praskóvya's son ?

SASHA. You remember me now, Astéryi Ivanovitch.

ASTÉRYI. How have you risen from the dead ?

How have you come back from the grave—you who were dead and buried these twenty years and more ?

SASHA. I have not risen from the dead. I have not come back from the grave ; but I have come a long, long journey.

ASTÉRYI. From where ?

SASHA. From Siberia.

FOMÁ. From Siberia ?

ASTÉRYI. What were you doing in Siberia ?

SASHA. Do you not understand, Astéryi Ivanovitch ? I am a criminal.

ASTÉRYI. Ah !

SASHA. A convict, a felon. I have escaped and come home.

ASTÉRYI. Of what crime have you been guilty ?

SASHA. Do not ask me so many questions, but give me something to eat.

ASTÉRYI. But tell me this . . .

SASHA. There is food here. I smelt it as I came in. (*He eats the meat with his fingers ravenously, like a wild beast*)

FOMÁ. It is your mother's supper.

SASHA. I do not care whose supper it is. I am ravenous. I have had nothing to eat all day.

FOMÁ. Can this wild beast be Praskóvyá's son ?

SASHA. We are all wild beasts if we are kept from food. Ha ! and vodka, too ! (*Helping himself*)

ASTÉRYI. Are you a convict, a felon, Sasha ? You who were dead ? Then we have been deceived for many years.

SASHA. Have you ?

ASTÉRYI. Some other man was murdered twenty years ago. The murderer said that it was you.

SASHA. Ah, he said that it was me, did he ?

ASTÉRYI. Why did Adámek say that it was you ?

SASHA. Can you not guess ? Adámek murdered no one.

ASTÉRYI. He murdered no one ? But he was condemned.

SASHA. He was never condemned.

ASTÉRYI. Never condemned ? Then what became of him ?

SASHA. He died. . . . Do you not understand ?  
It was I who killed Adámek.

ASTÉRYI. You !

SASHA. We had quarrelled. We were alone in a solitary place. I killed him and stood looking down at him with the knife in my hand dripping scarlet in the snow, frightened at the sudden silence and what I had done. And while I thought I was alone, I turned and saw the police-officer with his revolver levelled at my head. Then amid the confusion and black horror that seized on me, a bright thought shot across my mind. Adámek had no relatives, no friends ; he was an outcast. Stained with his flowing blood, I exchanged names with him ; that's the old heroic custom of blood-brotherhood, you know. I named myself Adámek ; I named my victim Sasha. Ingenious, wasn't it ? I had romantic ideas in those days. Adámek has been cursed for a murderer, and my memory has been honoured. Alexander Petróvitch has been a hero ; my mother has wept for me. I have seen her in the graveyard lamenting on my tomb ; I have read my name on the cross. I hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry. Evidently she loves me still.

ASTÉRYI. And you ?

SASHA. Do I love her ? No. There is no question of that. She is part of a life that was ended too long ago. I have only myself to think of now. What should I gain by loving her ? Understand, I am an outlaw, an escaped convict ; a word can send me back to the mines. I must hide myself, the patrols are everywhere. . . . Even here I am not safe. (*Locks the street door*)

ASTÉRYI. Why have you returned ? Why have you spoilt what you began so well ? Having resolved twenty years ago to vanish like a dead man . . .

SASHA. Ah ! if they had killed me then I would have died willingly. But after twenty years remorse goes, pity goes, everything goes ; entombed in the mines, but still alive . . . I was worn out. I could bear it no longer. Others were escaping, I escaped with them. . . .

ASTÉRYI. This will break her heart. She has made an angel of you. The lamp is always burning. . . .

SASHA. (*Going to the eikon corner with a glass of vodka in his hand*) Aha ! Alexander Nevski, my patron saint. I drink to you, my friend : but I cannot congratulate you on your work. As a guardian angel you have been something of a failure. And what is this ? (*Taking a photograph*) Myself ! Who would have known

this for my portrait ? Look at the angel child, with the soft cheeks and the pretty curly hair. How innocent and good I looked ! (*Bringing it down*) And even then I was deceiving my mother. She never understood that a young man must live, he must live. We are animals first ; we have instincts that need something warmer, something livelier, than the tame dull round of home. (*He throws down the photograph ; FOMÁ replaces it*) And even now I have no intention of dying. Yet how am I to live ? I cannot work ; the mines have sucked out all my strength. Has my mother any money ?

ASTÉRYI. (*To FOMÁ*) What can we do with him ?

SASHA. Has my mother any money ?

ASTÉRYI. Money ? Of course not. Would she let lodgings if she had ? Listen. I am a poor man myself, but I will give you ten roubles and your railway fare to go to St Petersburg.

SASHA. St Petersburg ? And what shall I do there when I have spent the ten roubles ?

ASTÉRYI. (*Shrugging his shoulders*) How do I know ? Live there, die there, only stay away from here.

FOMÁ. What right have you to send him away ? Why do you suppose that she will not be glad to see him ? Let her see her saint bedraggled,

and love him still—that is what true love means. You have regaled her with lies all these years ; but now it is no longer possible. (*A knocking at the door*) She is at the door.

ASTÉRYI. (*To SASHA*) Come with me. (*To FOMÁ*) He must go out by the other way.

FOMÁ. (*Stopping them*) No, I forbid it. It is the hand of God that has led him here. Go and unlock the door. (*ASTÉRYI shrugs his shoulders, and goes to unlock the door*) (*To SASHA, hiding him*) Stand here a moment till I have prepared your mother.

*Enter PRASKÓVYA and VARVÁRA, carrying a box.*

PRASKÓVYA. Why is the door locked ? Were you afraid without old Praskóvya to protect you ? Here is the money. Now let me count it. Have you two been quarrelling ? There are fifty roubles in this bag, all in little pieces of silver ; it took me two years.

FOMÁ. How you must have denied yourself, Praskóvya Petróvna, and all to build a hut in a churchyard !

PRASKÓVYA. On what better thing could money be spent ?

FOMÁ. You are so much in love with your tomb-house, I believe that you would be sorry if it turned out that your son was not dead, but alive.

PRASKÓVYA. Why do you say such things ? You know that I should be glad. Ah ! if I

could but see him once again as he was then,  
and hold him in my arms !

FOMÁ. But he would not be the same now.

PRASKÓVYA. If he were different, he would not  
be my son.

FOMÁ. What if all these years he had been an  
outcast, living in degradation ?

PRASKÓVYA. Who has been eating here ? Who  
has been drinking here ? Something has  
happened ! Tell me what it is.

ASTÉRYI. Your son is not dead.

PRASKÓVYA. Not dead ? Why do you say it so  
sadly ? No, it is not true. I do not believe  
it. How can I be joyful at the news if you  
tell it so sadly ? If he is alive, where is he ?  
Let me see him.

ASTÉRYI. He is here. (*SASHA comes forward*)

PRASKÓVYA. No, no ! Tell me that that is not  
him . . . my son whom I have loved all  
these years, my son that lies in the church-  
yard. (*To SASHA*) Don't be cruel to me.  
Say that you are not my son ; you cannot be  
my son.

SASHA. You know that I am your son.

PRASKÓVYA. My son is dead ; he was murdered.  
I buried his body in the Tróitski Cemetery.

SASHA. But you see that I was not murdered.  
Touch me ; feel me. I am alive. I and  
Adámek fought ; it was not Adámek that  
slew *me*, it was . . .

PRASKÓVYA. No, no ! I want to hear no more. You have come to torment me. Only say what you want of me, anything, and I will do it, if you will leave me in peace.

SASHA. I want food and clothing ; I want shelter ; I must have money.

PRASKÓVYA. You will go if I give you money ? Yes ? Say that you will go, far, far away, and never come back to tell lies. . . . But I have no money to give ; I am a poor woman.

SASHA. Come, what's all this ?

PRASKÓVYA. No, no ! I need it ; I can't spare it. What I have I have starved myself to get. Two roubles, five roubles, even ten roubles I will give you, if you will go far, far away. . . .

FOMÁ. Before he can travel we must bribe some peasant to lend him his passport.

PRASKÓVYA. Has he no passport then ?

FOMÁ. No. (*A knock*)

*Enter SPIRIDÓN*

SPIRIDÓN. Peace be on this house. May the saints watch over all of you ! Astéryi Ivano-vitch will have told you of my proposal.

PRASKÓVYA. Yes, I have heard of it, Spiridón.

FOMÁ. Good-bye, Spiridón ; there is no work for you here. That is all over.

PRASKÓVYA. Why do you say that that is all over ?

FOMÁ. There will be no tomb-house to build.

PRASKÓVYA. No tomb-house? How dare you say so? He is laughing at us, Spiridón. The tomb-house that we have planned together, with the table in the middle, and the two chairs. . . . Do not listen to him, Spiridón. At last I have money enough; let us count it together.

SASHA. Give me my share, mother!

PRASKÓVYA. I have no money for you.

SASHA. (*Advancing*) I must have money.

PRASKÓVYA. You shall not touch it.

SASHA. I will not go unless you give me money.

PRASKÓVYA. It is not mine. I have promised it all to Spiridón. Help me, Astéryi Ivánovich; he will drive me mad! Oh, what must I do? What must I do? Is there no way, Varvára? (*Tap of drums without*) (*To SASHA*) Go! go! go quickly, or worse will befall you.

SASHA. I will not go and starve while you have all this money.

PRASKÓVYA. Ah! Since you will have it so. . . . It is you, not I! (*Running out at the door and calling* Patrol! Patrol!)

FOMÁ. Stop her.

VARVÁRA. Oh, Hóspodi!

PRASKÓVYA. Help! Help! Come here!

FOMÁ. What have you done? What have you done?

*Enter CORPORAL and SOLDIERS*

PRASKÓVYA. This man is a thief and a murderer. He is a convict escaped from Siberia. He has no passport.

CORPORAL. Is that true ? Where is your passport ?

SASHA. I have none.

CORPORAL. We are looking for such men as you. Come !

SASHA. This woman is my mother.

CORPORAL. That's her affair. You have no passport ; that is enough for me. You'll soon be back on the road to the North with the rest of them.

SASHA. Woman ! woman ! Have pity on your son.

CORPORAL. Come along, lad, and leave the old woman in peace.

*[Exit SASHA in custody]*

PRASKÓVYA. The Lord help me ! (PRASKÓVYA stumbles towards the eikons and sinks blindly before them)

FOMÁ. (*Looking after SASHA*) Poor devil !

ASTÉRYI. What's a man compared to an idea ?  
(PRASKÓVYA rolls over, dead)

CURTAIN

# DERELICTS

*A Play in One Act*

## CHARACTERS

ROBERT, *unmarried, aged 52*  
AGATHA, *unmarried, aged 47*  
A MOTHER, *aged 50*  
UNCLE, *a retired admiral, aged 60*  
ARTHUR, *a sailor, aged 22*  
GIRL, *aged 19*

*Hotel guests in the background*

*VOICES of GIRLS laughing in the garden and  
calling “Arthur”*

## DERELICTS

SCENE : *Clipped yew-hedge screen. Carved stone seat. Rhododendrons. Faint lights in Chinese lanterns in the distance.*

*A hotel garden, on a summer night, in the light of a full moon. Japanese lanterns in the distance and pairs of young people moving among the shrubs. Good dance music well played sounds at intervals from the hotel and every now and then there is the noise of laughter in the garden.*

MOTHER *sitting crying on a garden seat in the background. Music playing.*

Enter AGATHA

MOTHER. Who's that ?

AGATHA. It's only me.

MOTHER. Ah, Miss Robinson . . .

AGATHA. Harrison.

MOTHER. Harrison, I mean, you startled me.  
I thought I was alone.

AGATHA. I'm sorry to intrude on you.

MOTHER. No, no. Were you out for a walk ?

AGATHA. I was strolling round the hotel garden enjoying the moonlight. (*Laughter in the garden*) How wonderful everything looks.

MOTHER. Yes, doesn't it !

AGATHA. All the flowers look like ghosts.

MOTHER. Yes. . . . It's rather a lonely amusement ?

AGATHA. Oh, I'm used to that. (*A pause.*  
*Laughter in the garden*) I wonder you're not looking on at the dancing.

MOTHER. I was, but I felt so—so . . .

AGATHA. You're not ill ?

MOTHER. No, but I was feeling so terribly anxious.

AGATHA. Anxious ?

MOTHER. Yes, I have such a presentiment of evil ; I had to come down here to hide my face from them.

VOICES of GIRLS. (*Calling in the garden*)  
Arthur ! Arthur !

AGATHA. Isn't it your son that they call Arthur ?

MOTHER. Yes.

AGATHA. He seems to be a great favourite.

MOTHER. Yes.

AGATHA. I don't wonder. He seems so bright, so full of life. Isn't he a sailor ?

MOTHER. Yes. (*Crying*)

AGATHA. Have I said anything to hurt you ?

MOTHER. No, no. Please forgive me. We mothers . . . Ah, my dear, if women only knew . . . the unmarried . . . what sorrows they escape !

AGATHA. We have the advantage of you in many ways. (*Taking her hand*) Don't mind

crying before me. We old maids, all the sorrow we might have felt for ourselves, I think we are able to feel it for others.

MOTHER. You're very good, my dear.

*(Music ceases)*

AGATHA. If you knew what pleasure I get from the mere nearness to the family life of others. I ought not to have said anything . . .

MOTHER. Yes, yes.

AGATHA. But I have felt so drawn to you and your son these few days.

MOTHER. Thank you, thank you, my dear. It's a relief to talk. Oh, if only you knew. . . . He's been in the navy five years already. I'm expecting the news at any moment. They say he will be ordered out to the Persian Gulf to fight Arabs. A little child that lay in these arms such a little while ago. *(Listening)* What's that ?

AGATHA. I don't hear anything.

MOTHER. *(Agitatedly)* Somebody's coming ! It's them. O heavens !

*Enter ARTHUR and UNCLE*

ARTHUR. Here's Uncle Bob, Mother !

UNCLE. *(Going quickly to her)* Now bear up, Amy, bear up ! I've been to the Admiralty and took the first train down to let you know.

MOTHER. He's going ? *(A silence.* MOTHER falls on ARTHUR's neck weeping and is led

*away farther into the garden. Music begins again, a romantic, melancholy valse)*

UNCLE. (*As they go*) One ought to be pleased. It's a splendid thing to see some active work so early.

(AGATHA *sits, crying gently out of sympathy and wiping her eyes. A pause*)

*Enter ROBERT*

ROBERT. What, Agatha? Driven out, like myself, by the noise, I suppose.

AGATHA. (*Quite recovered*) Not driven out; but I like it better from here.

ROBERT. More romantic, eh?

AGATHA. Yes, more romantic. Don't put your pipe away on my account.

ROBERT. You don't mind my calling you Agatha, do you?

AGATHA. My dear Robert, of course not! We were boy and girl together.

ROBERT. Yes, but although we live in the same town we meet so seldom. . . . Curious our meeting by chance right away from home like this. It's very . . . what's the word? . . . incriminating, invidious, no, compromising. What would people say in Worcester if they knew that you and I were sitting out *tête-à-tête* in a romantic garden in the moonlight talking?

AGATHA. I think they might overhear us without a blush.

ROBERT. Well, I suppose we used to do it years ago in the old Linden Lodge days ?

AGATHA. I suppose we must have. . . . I met Fanny Fairburn that was, the other day. . . .

ROBERT. Fanny Fairburn. . . . Fancy your remembering !

AGATHA. What a long time ago that was !

ROBERT. Used people ever to imagine anything ?

AGATHA. We all expected to hear of an engagement.

ROBERT. Ah ! (*A pause. He sings to the dance music*) It's not much use going to bed while this tum-tumming goes on. That's the worst of hotels. . . . There was no peace even in the smoking-room. They were talking golf on one side of me and motor cars on the other. . . . Have you been making an expedition to-day ?

AGATHA. Yes ; have you ?

ROBERT. Yes. I bicycled over to Newland Hay and got some capital rubbings. It's an early Norman church with a leper-squint and remains of Saxon in the south transept. The brasses are very fine, with rather unusual heraldic treatment. Both branches of the Castleowens were buried there for generations and it's very curious to see the way the individuals vary in their differencing for cadency. I rather suspect Scotch influence.

AGATHA. Can I see your rubbings ?

ROBERT. I'll show them to you in the morning.  
And what luck have you had ?

AGATHA. I believe I'm on the track of something really important.

ROBERT. Really ! What sort of thing ?

AGATHA. A palaeolithic station in the river-bed.

ROBERT. Ah !

AGATHA. Oh, don't say "Ah" like that ; it's a much bigger thing than you understand. In fact, if I am right, it will entirely revolutionise all present theories as to the succession of the early civilisations in this part of the country. It was over at Warham, near the Banstead eaves where Dalton found remains of the aënlithic age. . . .

ROBERT. And what does your find consist of ?

AGATHA. At present only a few scattered pieces, two or three cores, a few flakes, and one hammerstone.

ROBERT. You're sure they're not natural accidents ?

AGATHA. There's no doubt about human agency ; the bulbs of percussion are quite plain. (*Gleefully*) I never saw such a small collection so rich in bulbs of percussion. But the point is this, that my palaeolithic station seems to be of *later date* than Dalton's aënlithic. . . .

ROBERT. Really ?

AGATHA. Yes, for although the floor of the

caves is in actual point of measurement higher than the gravel, it belongs to an older formation, diluvial in fact. Either therefore the flints which I found must have been washed down without losing their relative positions, which is impossible, or else the aenolithic civilisation which produced the remains found by Dalton must have been superseded or overlaid by a . . .

Enter ARTHUR *behind with a GIRL*

ROBERT. Yes ?

AGATHA. Must have been superseded or overlaid by a . . . There must have been a reversion to an earlier . . .

(ARTHUR *murmurs in the GIRL's ear*)

GIRL. Oh, don't, don't say such things !

ARTHUR. I must know ! I must know !

[*Exeunt ARTHUR and GIRL*]

ROBERT. (*Looking round*) What's up ? . . . But I don't see, if the caves are higher . . .

AGATHA. Eh ?

ROBERT. If the caves are higher . . .

AGATHA. What caves ?

ROBERT. Dalton's caves.

AGATHA. Yes, yes. . . .

ROBERT. Of course it is only recently that the water has exposed the gravel-beds, but the deposits in them may be of any . . .

AGATHA. (*Crying*) Oh, I can't talk archaeology any more to-night.

ROBERT. My dear Agatha . . . Don't cry.  
What is it? Can I get you anything?

*Re-enter ARTHUR and GIRL*

ARTHUR. Is it true? Oh, my darling, darling  
love!

[ARTHUR and the GIRL exchange  
*a long kiss and Exeunt*

ROBERT. (*Startled*) Good Lord! (*A pause*)

AGATHA. Did you see? (*Crying*) What a fool  
I am! But I can't help it. There's some-  
thing hysterical in the weather, I think. I've  
been feeling queer all day. And then I've  
been so moved by a lady I met out here just  
now—his mother. You know, that nice  
woman who sits doing nothing on the ver-  
andah. (*End of the valse*) He's going away  
to fight in a war against Arabs. And then  
this! . . . Oh, Robert, Robert! Everything  
about us seems so full of love and poetry;  
and you and I sit here babbling about brass  
rubbings and flint implements . . . (*Sound of  
laughter*) Oh dear, oh dear! What have I  
done with my life? my little life, the only  
life I had to live, the life that was meant  
to live and love in. (*Laughter*) Oh, you'd  
better go; I'm only fit to be alone. No,  
don't go. What does it matter? I'm old  
enough to speak my mind. I can't be  
bottled up all my life. It is envy, envy that  
makes me speak, envy of him, of her, of

---

mothers, of children, of you, of everybody.  
(*Laughter*) Why must I sit by alone and starve ?

ROBERT. We've had our day, you and I.

AGATHA. Have we, Robert ? Have I had my day ?

ROBERT. Well, haven't you ?

AGATHA. When have I had my day ?

ROBERT. Well, I suppose you used to fall in love like other people, only for some reason or other it didn't end in marriage. In fact . . .

AGATHA. In fact what ?

ROBERT. Oh, nothing. A piece of gossip occurred to me.

AGATHA. Worcester gossip ? About me ?

ROBERT. Well, yes. Some story of an affair in early life. I oughtn't to have mentioned it.

AGATHA. A story that I was engaged and broke it off ?

ROBERT. Yes, something like that. Everybody knew. You never denied it.

AGATHA. No, I never denied it.

ROBERT. Well, there you are then !

AGATHA. I liked people to think it ; it made me more interesting. But it isn't true. I was never engaged.

ROBERT. Never engaged ?

AGATHA. I was never in love ; nobody ever loved me.

ROBERT. Never in love ?

AGATHA. No. . . . You remember the sort of girl I was in those days ; neither particularly pretty nor particularly plain.

ROBERT. Oh, come, come !

AGATHA. Oh, I know. If I had cultivated that little warmth and openness which make men love such girls, I should have succeeded as well as another, I dare say. But I was proud. Supposing after all I should fail ? Supposing that I should fall in love and not get a full return ? The idea was humiliating. I said, Let others seek after *me*, not I after *them*. Well, nobody ever sought after me, and the years slipped by, and suddenly it was too late.

ROBERT. Yes, one finds it out suddenly.

AGATHA. The injustice of men is nothing to the injustice of life itself. The division of poor and rich is nothing to the division of those who live and those who only look on. For we all have the same longings ; and some, some are fed so bountifully ; life is so full for them. . . . Oh, if something could be taken from their superfluity and given to the others. . . . But it can't. . . . Think of it ! Think of it ! Never to have loved, never to have been loved, never to have had a child to delight in or to sorrow over ; and to know that now it is too late, too late. . . .

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ROBERT. It is quite true. One has missed the great pleasures of life. (*A pause*) But then there's the other side.

AGATHA. Ah, I know. This poor lady, the boy's mother, said the same: "If unmarried women only knew what sorrows they escape!" Do you think I do not realise all that? But give me the sorrow, give me a thousand times the sorrow, only one glimpse here and there of joy; or let it be all pain; oh, better a thousand thousand times than this tame low-level of joyless painless life. You do not know what it is for a woman. We have to invent things to keep us alive; we invent occupations; we throw ourselves into pursuits; we become talented, or learned, play the piano, write, paint or hunt for palaeolithic implements. Ah, how I envy you!

ROBERT. You envy me?

AGATHA. Yes. A man has his place in the world. He does not need children to give him his place. These things are only his amusements; his work is his life. He does not hunger for love and get none. He can search for love till he finds it. If he turns away from it he does so with a genuine and noble pride because his work is a greater thing to him. . . .

ROBERT. Yes, a fascinating employment, that

of a country solicitor ! Keeping accounts, issuing leases, drawing up mortgages, attending petty sessions . . .

AGATHA. Are you discontented too ?

*(Melancholy valse until the end of the play)*

ROBERT. I've often heard women talk like this about the enviability of men because of their work, the dignity of their work, the interest of their work. That's because women don't realise what men's work means. . . . How many men enjoy their work ? Oh, artists, musicians, writers, I dare say, I don't know ; but I never met anybody else yet who wouldn't be glad to swap his profession for somebody else's. No, don't talk to country solicitors about their pride in their noble calling ! Work's a way of getting a living, that's all, and if you take too much pride in the process, it's a way of losing everything that's worth living for. That's what happened to me. . . . The best years of my life, when I should have been falling in love, were spent in struggling to get a footing as a solicitor in Worcester. I hated the work itself, but I delighted in watching the slow process of my success. I was mortally afraid of poverty, mortally afraid of being a failure. I was growing into an old man at thirty, when Heaven put out a finger to help me. I met Fanny Fairburn by accident at my aunt's.

AGATHA. Ah !

ROBERT. Yes, I fell in love with her. I frequented the dances at Linden Lodge. It was hard work for an early riser, but I did it. I seemed to have reached a natural breathing-space in my career ; I could allow myself a little latitude ; I was so firmly established at last that I need no longer be afraid of poverty. . . . I wonder I'm not ashamed to come out on nights like this. They were just such nights then. . . . The full moon in summer always seems to have a reproachful look on its face. . . . I kept putting off telling Fanny Fairburn that I wanted to marry her ; until at last one day I resolved to end it. But as I was dressing to go to the dance a panic seized me. I looked round in alarm at my neat little bachelor chambers, the haven of security that I had won myself with so much toil. And then I pictured the jerry-built villa on the outskirts, the draggled servant, the squalling children, all the struggle to begin over again. I took to my heels and fled.

AGATHA. Fled ?

ROBERT. Yes. I tore off my dress suit with trembling hands, climbed into tweeds, caught the night train to London and disappeared abroad on a holiday, leaving the clerk in charge. That was the end of my romance. (*A pause*)

AGATHA. What a miserable time you must have had !

ROBERT. That first time ? Oh, not so bad as you might think. I filled every moment with something. That was when I started my hobbies ; I'd never had any before. No, at first it went pretty easily. I patted myself on the back. My moment of panic presented itself to me in the light of an interval of reason. It was later that it was slowly borne in on me what I had missed. . . . She was married by then. (*A pause*)

AGATHA. Did you never fall in love again ?

ROBERT. Nothing to speak of. Never dangerously.

AGATHA. I am sorry for you. To have had it in your grasp. . . . I think you must know what remorse is.

ROBERT. Yes, a bitter regret for my cowardly choice. I feel it still ; that . . . and the fear of solitude.

AGATHA. Ah !

ROBERT. You know it ?

AGATHA. I put it away from me. I steel myself, but it is always there.

ROBERT. That's the keenest of all fears. (*Sound of laughter in the garden*) If we but knew it in our youth ! What evil can be compared to it ? . . . Solitude ! . . . Oh, it is nothing to be alone in a room, in a house,

in a town, nothing ! But the solitude of the spirit (*laughter*), to put out hands and find no one near, nothing near, nothing that links one to the universal spirit. Isn't that fear at the bottom of all love and friendship ? Aren't they the expression of our struggle to escape from the solitary confinement in which we find ourselves going mad ? (*Laughter*) And old age coming on, when the soul must withdraw itself more and more into itself. . . . To know that the darkest hour of all will come and find one all alone. . . . (*A pause*) In moments of general terror people cling together in search of comfort. In cities suddenly overwhelmed by earthquake the bodies of children are found hand in hand in long lines. But we . . . Agatha ! is it too late ? We who both know the same fear, cannot we take hands like the children ?

AGATHA. How do you mean ?

ROBERT. Take pity on each other's solitude, join our lives.

AGATHA. Join our lives ? Marry, do you mean ?

ROBERT. Yes.

AGATHA. Why we ? We do not love each other.

ROBERT. No, but the sudden realising of the same great thing together. The children don't choose ; they clutch at the nearest.

Anything rather than stand alone. It will be too late if we hesitate. (*Eagerly*) Chance has drawn us together. For the moment our confidences have made us nearer than we ever shall be to anyone else.

AGATHA. (*Hesitating*) But, Robert, we are each set in our habits, in our way of life. . . .

ROBERT. My habits ! Who cares ? Think of the novelty, the curiosity, the pity we feel for each other, the friendship and protection that must grow from it. Not to return again alone to one's monotonous melancholy room ; not to be driven into the street by the longing to see a human face.

AGATHA. (*Agitated*) Don't let us be rash, Robert. I realise all that you say . . .

ROBERT. Don't hesitate. It will be too late, too late.

AGATHA. Give me time to think ! Give me time . . .

VOICES. Arthur ! Arthur !

AGATHA. (*Starting at the sound*) No ! Back to common sense ! It's too late already, Robert. If there were an ounce of love between us, or even of pity for each other . . . But there is none. We have passed through a sentimental crisis together, that is all. It is pity that moves us, but only pity for ourselves, wrought up by the surroundings of this summer night, the scent of the flowers,

the moonlight, the music, the lovers. We are each scared at our own desperate situation ; we are not nearer each other by an inch.

VOICES. Arthur ! Arthur !

AGATHA. (*Imitating softly*) "Arthur ! Arthur ! "

Arthur seems to have all the love that grows in this garden. Don't let us profane this wonderful thing out of mere envy and despair.

ROBERT. Listen to me, Agatha . . .

AGATHA. I am going in. Don't be offended. What I am saying is wisest. We will meet and be friends ; but you and I cannot help each other out of our inward solitude. If we married we should soon wake up to our mistake. Two egotisms do not make a love. Once this momentary haze of romance was blown away by the breath of common life, we should each find ourselves in a more frightful solitude than before, only aggravated by the near presence of another solitude as irremediable as our own. . . . Let us make the best of the little that we have to blind us to the disagreeable truth.

ROBERT. What have I ?

AGATHA. You have your work and your hobbies and your pipe. I must rub along as best I can with my patience and my palaeolithic implements.

ROBERT. What use are they? What I want is . . .

AGATHA. We've set out on the road that leads to a solitary old age; let's finish it gracefully; don't let's turn off at the last moment. . . . We have reached the time of life when there is no salvation in the feelings; everything depends on the will. We must have courage.

ROBERT. That's it, courage. That is what we can give each other. Like condemned felons in the cart, like Frenchmen in the Terror waiting for the tumbrels . . .

AGATHA. Such courage is worth nothing.

ROBERT. Anything is better than being afraid.

AGATHA. No. Since I am not to have had the pleasures of life, I will at least have had its beauties; yes, its decencies, its dignities, the pride of my losses. I am afraid of my solitude; but I am more afraid of desecrating the dignity of it by ineffective remedies. I lament my lovelessness, but I should lament far more if I had sullied my ideal of love by marrying for cowardly motives. . . . You see? We oughtn't to be envious. We ought to rejoice at being spectators.

ROBERT. You were always so damned reasonable, Agatha. I believe that's why nobody ever married you.

AGATHA. Now you're yourself again.

ROBERT. I suppose I ought to apologise.  
Heaven knows what I haven't said !

AGATHA. It was I that started the conversation.  
For the first time in my life I realised the bitterness of my loss. But the talk has done me good ; it has shown me how to bear myself towards it.

ROBERT. You're a brave woman.

AGATHA. Thank you. I must be saying good-night ; I want to start early to renew my search among the gravel.

ROBERT. Good-night. (*Taking her hand and holding it*)

AGATHA. Aren't you coming back to the hotel ?

ROBERT. No, I'm going to stay out here and have a pipe.

AGATHA. Well, good-night, then. (*Shaking hands*)

[AGATHA goes slowly away.

(ROBERT lights his pipe and sits pondering gloomily to the sound of the dance music)

CURTAIN



GEMINAE  
*A Farce in One Act*

## CHARACTERS

**ALEXANDER**, *a noble and romantic Scotchman*

**CHARLES**, *his friend, a plain Lancashireman*

**ROSE**  
**VIOLET** } *the twins*

**A WAITER**

## GEMINAE

SCENE : *In a private sitting-room in an Edinburgh hotel, door C. to the corridor : door L. to ALEXANDER'S private smoking-room.*

ALEXANDER, CHARLES, the WAITER discovered.  
*The WAITER receives money from CHARLES, and hands him a hotel receipt.*

WAITER. (*To CHARLES*) There is the receipt, Sir.

CHARLES. (*Handing it to ALEXANDER*) There !

[*Exit WAITER C.*

ALEXANDER. How fortunate I was to meet an old schoolfellow. Stranded in an Edinburgh hotel, my luggage taken from me ! Me, The MacKechnie of Kechnie Castle ! My dear Charles, I am under an infinite obligation to you. If ever I have a chance of repaying it, depend on me !

CHARLES. You promise ?

ALEXANDER. On the honour of The MacKechnie.

CHARLES. Good ! Then do what I said : find me a wife with mooney.

ALEXANDER. Ah ! How solid you Englishmen are ! You have no romance. A wife with money ! Perish the thought !

CHARLES. Wouldn't you like a wife with mooney ?

ALEXANDER. Never ! When I marry, it shall be a penniless girl, an orphan. I could not have a moment's peace unless I felt

my wife owed everything in the world to me !

CHARLES. But you don't seem to have much brass about.

ALEXANDER. It is true. Kechnie Castle is mortgaged up to the battlements ; my mother and sister live on crusts.

CHARLES. Then how are you going to support your penniless wife ?

ALEXANDER. I can work. Do you think I am afraid of work ?

CHARLES. What work ?

ALEXANDER. I have my music, my painting.

CHARLES. Pah ! Then why don't you begin ?

ALEXANDER. Until I am married I have no incentive, no inspiration.

CHARLES. Then why don't you marry ? Is it such a complicated matter to get married in Scotland.

ALEXANDER. It is simplicity itself. All you have to do is to take a girl by the hand in the presence of two witnesses and say, "This is my wife."

CHARLES. What, if I take a girl by the hand in this room and say, "This is my wife," do you mean that I am married ?

ALEXANDER. Irrevocably.

CHARLES. Then what's the obstacle ? Can't you find a lass to fall in love with ?

ALEXANDER. I am passionately, hopelessly in love.

CHARLES. And is the lady too rich for your taste ?

ALEXANDER. No, there is no difficulty there. In fact they are penniless.

CHARLES. They ? How many of them are there ?

ALEXANDER. Two, only two.

CHARLES. And you love them both ?

ALEXANDER. Desperately !

CHARLES. Both equally ?

ALEXANDER. How could I help it ? If I loved the one it was impossible not to love the other. They are both exactly alike. They are twins.

CHARLES. Twins ?

ALEXANDER. I cannot even tell them apart ; I am constantly confusing them. Oh, Charles, they are so beautiful, so tender and gracious, with oval faces and willowy forms, fair hair, blue eyes, and withal something so touching, so childlike and affecting in their look.

CHARLES. Ah, if only one of them had a little mooney, she'd be just the wife for me.

ALEXANDER. You shall see them for yourself. They telegraphed for me to come here about some business. I am expecting them any minute.

CHARLES. Are you their guardian ?

ALEXANDER. Not formally. Their actual guardian is an uncle, a ne'er-do-well without a penny, who went to America years ago and has never taken any further notice of them. As head of the clan, of course I had to . . .

CHARLES. But come now, is there really no difference between them? Surely they don't share all the same tastes, the same pursuits?

ALEXANDER. You are right: Rose is an artist; Violet, a musician.

CHARLES. There you are, then: sympathy of tastes: that's the thing in marriage.

ALEXANDER. But unfortunately my passion for those twin arts is also equally divided. The time I can spare from my painting I devote wholly to my music; the moment I can tear myself from my fiddle, I fly instantly back to my easel.

CHARLES. I'll tell you what it is; you've been looking at this thing from too selfish a point of view: you're blinded by egotism, that's what's the matter with you.

ALEXANDER. Me?

CHARLES. The foundation of happiness in married life is mutual love. You needn't go worrying which of them you love the most: what you've got to do is to find out which of them *loves you*!

ALEXANDER. But how?

CHARLES. Propose!

ALEXANDER. To which ?

CHARLES. To both ! You won't have got six words out of your mouth before the one will blush, the other will leave the room.

ALEXANDER. A thousand thanks ! I see all my difficulties vanishing before me ! Oh, thank you, thank you !

*Enter WAITER C.*

WAITER. If you please, Sir, there's a lady to see you.

ALEXANDER. A lady ? Are you sure it isn't *two* ladies ?

WAITER. Mebbe you're right, Sir ; but they're so varra much alike that I ascribed it to a deeficulty of vision to which I am sometimes subject.

[*Exit WAITER C.*

CHARLES. I'll leave you, my lad.

ALEXANDER. Go into the smoking-room. I'll follow your advice and let you know the result. Go in here.

[*Exit CHARLES L.*

(ALEXANDER *brings two nosegays to a table.*

*Enter the TWINS C. in black frocks with white frills at neck and wrists)*

ALEXANDER. Ah, dearest Violet, dearest Rose ! It is Rose, isn't it ?

ROSE. I am Rose, cousin.

ALEXANDER. Excuse me, excuse me ! (*They sit*)

VIOLET. Dear Alexander !

ROSE. Dearest cousin !

VIOLET. How happy we are to see you again !

ALEXANDER. I am terribly distressed about this loss which has befallen you.

ROSE. Ah yes !

VIOLET. Ah yes !

ALEXANDER. Your guardian, your uncle !

ROSE. We feel it very much, Alexander.

VIOLET. Though, of course . . .

ROSE. As we had never seen him . . .

VIOLET. It makes a difference. . . . Doesn't Rose look lovely in black ?

*(They show their clothes)*

ROSE. Isn't Violet sweet ?

VIOLET. Turn round, my darling.

ROSE. Let him see your frock too, my pet.

VIOLET. Don't those ruffles become her ?

ROSE. Isn't her back a dream ?

ALEXANDER. You're both so lovely. I'm quite bewildered. And now to the business that made you send for me.

ROSE. The business ?

VIOLET. Oh yes, the business. We have had a letter from America.

ROSE. From uncle's lawyers.

VIOLET. We haven't opened it.

ROSE. We kept it for you.

VIOLET. Here it is. *(Handing him a big envelope)*

ALEXANDER. Come, let's see what it is.

ROSE. No, don't open it now.

VIOLET. Read it afterwards.

ROSE. We have something far more important.

VIOLET. That was only an excuse.

ALEXANDER. An excuse? Why, what on earth can it be?

VIOLET. You begin, Rosie.

ROSE. Begin yourself, dear Vi.

ALEXANDER. (*With determination*) No! Let me have my word first. I too have something else that I must speak about. Rose, Violet, living together with you under the same roof at Kechnie Castle all these years, face to face with all your loveliness and refinement, it was impossible but that I should begin to feel something more than the feeling of an ordinary kinsman towards . . . towards one of you.

VIOLET. Cousin!

ROSE. Sandy!

ALEXANDER. The time has come when I must declare myself.

VIOLET. You are making Rosie blush.

ALEXANDER. (*Delighted*) Ah!

ROSE. And Violet too.

ALEXANDER. (*Bewildered*) Oh! I am resolved at last to hear my sentence from her lips.

ROSE and VIOLET. (*Rising together*) Shall I leave you?

ALEXANDER. No, no! Don't both go! (*They both sit*) Love, as you know, is not selfish, not

egotistical. Love goes by sympathy : we love where we are loved. I venture to hope that one of you will understand me, that one of you has felt some answering spark of what I feel.

VIOLET. Are you speaking to Rosie, cousin ?

ROSE. Or to Violet ?

ALEXANDER. To both, to both ! That is, to the one who . . . (*Rising in despair*) No, this is more than I can bear !

VIOLET. Perhaps we can help you, cousin.

ALEXANDER. Do !

VIOLET. Since we came to Edinburgh . . .

ROSE. We have discussed this very question between ourselves.

ALEXANDER. Eh ?

VIOLET. We have long perceived what you felt. We determined that if you still remained silent . . .

ROSE. Then it was for us to speak.

ALEXANDER. Speak on !

ROSE. We felt that one of us was in a false position.

ALEXANDER. Yes, yes, but which ?

ROSE. Endowed by nature as we were with the same characters.

VIOLET. Nurtured together.

ROSE. Exposed to the same influences.

VIOLET. Both owing you the same debt of gratitude . . .

ROSE. It was but natural that we should share the same sentiments.

VIOLET. For years we both cherished the same sisterly affection for you.

ROSE. But at last it ripened into something more.

ROSE and VIOLET. (*Falling on their knees together*) We both love you !

ALEXANDER. Oh, horror !

ROSE. Both with equal devotion.

VIOLET. Equal ardour.

ALEXANDER. But this is impossible ! One of you must choose.

VIOLET. We are only women.

ROSE. It is for the man to choose.

ALEXANDER. But I love you both.

ROSE. We can bear our suspense no longer.

VIOLET. We must know our fate to-day.

ROSE. Speak, and raise one of us to the pinnacle of bliss.

VIOLET. And plunge the other to the abysses of despair.

ALEXANDER. Oh, what am I to do ?

VIOLET. The one who loses you will bear her loss bravely.

ROSE. Without heart-burning.

VIOLET. Without repining.

ROSE. She will bind up her bleeding heart by marrying another.

VIOLET. Whom it will be your duty . . .

ROSE. As head of the clan.

VIOLET. To choose.

ALEXANDER. What, give you to another?

Rose, Violet, you whom I passionately adore!

Never!

VIOLET. You cannot have us both.

ALEXANDER. Ah, curse the tyranny of our brutal law, by which I am condemned either to lifelong solitude or to bigamy.

VIOLET. Think of those happy hours you spent wandering in the woods, talking of art with Rose.

ROSE. Or playing duets with Violet in the twilight.

VIOLET. Whispering pretty phrases . . .

ROSE. Tender nothings . . .

VIOLET. In her ears.

ROSE. And hers.

ALEXANDER. You told each other?

VIOLET. Never a word.

ROSE. We knew without.

ALEXANDER. But how?

ROSE. The sympathy of sisters.

VIOLET. The telepathy of twins.

ROSE. Nothing escaped us.

ALEXANDER. Good heavens! If I had known of this! And you were jealous?

VIOLET. Of Rosie? How absurd!

ROSE. Of Violet? Impossible!

ALEXANDER. You relieve me.

ROSE. What happy days those were when love  
first stole into our hearts.

VIOLET. Three hearts that beat as one.

ROSE. Calm and tender as the smile of Leo-  
nardo's Gioconda.

(ALEXANDER turns with an exclamation from one  
to the other at each phrase)

VIOLET. Or a berceuse by Chopin. Swelling  
anon to passion . . .

ROSE. Like the rich glow of a Titian.

VIOLET. Or the burst of the full orchestra.  
Our tiffs and reconciliations.

ROSE. The chiaroscuro of love.

VIOLET. The crescendo and diminuendo.

ALEXANDER. Ah no ! Give me time to think !

ROSE. To-day you must decide.

VIOLET. Or lose us for ever.

ALEXANDER. In your presence it is impossible.  
I am so bewildered by your symmetry, your  
similarity.

ROSE. Enough !

VIOLET. We give you a quarter of an hour to  
choose your fate.

ROSE. No more.

VIOLET. And now we'll leave you.

ROSE. You will find us walking in the corridor.

ALEXANDER. (Bringing nosegays) Take these  
flowers, my only loves ; the offering of a  
distracted heart. For you, fairest of Roses,  
a rose ; for you, sweetest of Violets, a bunch

of violets. If you cannot help me, I must turn to Charles, my friend and counsellor. He is here in the smoking-room. Charles ! Charles !

[Exit L.]

VIOLET. How tired you must be of roses, darling, everyone gives you roses.

ROSE. And you of violets, my angel ; nobody gives you anything but violets.

(They exchange bouquets, fixing them in each other's frocks)

VIOLET. Poor Alexander !

ROSE. Poor, poor Alexander !

VIOLET. And poor us !

ROSE. Come, sister.

[Exeunt C. with arms round each other's waists.]

Enter ALEXANDER and CHARLES L.

ALEXANDER. It is no good, I tell you, Charles ! They both love me. I am the unluckiest man in the world.

CHARLES. What, to have two girls in love with you ? Why, I never had even one.

ALEXANDER. They have presented an ultimatum. I am to marry one of them myself, and find a husband immediately for the other.

CHARLES. Was this the business that they sent for you about ?

ALEXANDER. Ah no, there was a letter. Here it is. But what do I care for that at such a moment ?

CHARLES. Business is business. We must open it.

ALEXANDER. Ah, will Heaven send me no help in this awful situation ?

CHARLES. (*Opening the letter*) Why, it's a will ; their uncle's will. He has left a fortune behind him.

ALEXANDER. A fortune ? Read it !

CHARLES. (*Reading*) Having all my life neglected my duties as guardian to my two nieces Rose and Violet MacKechnie, I have resolved to atone for it after my death.

ALEXANDER. Then all is ended ! I can marry neither.

CHARLES. (*Reading*) Having myself experienced both extremes of fortune and never been happy but twice, first when I was a pauper and second when I became a millionaire, and being fully convinced that the chief source of human misery is the possession of a moderate income, which, while removing all incentive . . .

ALEXANDER. Skip all that !

CHARLES. I have resolved to bequeath all my money to the one and leave the other penniless.

ALEXANDER. That decides me ! I take the penniless one.

CHARLES. Then remember your promise ; I take the rich one.

ALEXANDER. Agreed.

CHARLES. I leave all my fortune of £20,000 a year.

ALEXANDER. Ah, how happy I shall be at last !

CHARLES. But you don't know which it is yet.

ALEXANDER. Well, after all, Violet would never have come near my studio.

CHARLES. Of £20,000 a year, to Rose.

ALEXANDER. Well, well, she could not have played my accompaniments. (*Going to door C.*)

Come, girls, come ! I have made up my mind. Rose ! Violet ! (*Enter the Twins C.*)

I have opened the letter you gave me. Your uncle leaves £20,000 a year to Rose ; Violet is penniless. (*To ROSE*) Come, give me your hand. (*To VIOLET*) Give your hand to Charles ; he is your future husband.

I call you to witness, this is my wife !

CHARLES. I call you to witness, this is my wife !

ALEXANDER. Hand in hand, we go forth smiling to face poverty, my Violet.

ROSE. But I am Rose, darling ; we have £20,000 a year.

ALEXANDER. Ah ! (*Faints*)

VIOLET. And I have nothing !

CHARLES. Ah ! (*Faints*)

ROSE. He has married me by mistake ! (*Faints*)

VIOLET. He meant to marry me ! (*Faints*)

CURTAIN

PARKIN BROS.

*A Comedy in One Act*

## CHARACTERS

**PARKIN**, *a small grocer.*

**TOM**, *his son; burly and blunt; a draper's assistant.*

**ALBERT**, *his son-in-law; of a higher social status; clerk to a small chartered accountant.*

## PARKIN BROS.

SCENE: *In PARKIN'S back parlour. Night.*  
*Glass doors behind are wide open, and the interior of the shop is dimly visible by the light of a gas-jet turned low. Street door beyond, with bell on a long iron spring. Table with account books. TOM sits with his fingers in his hair adding up a column. PARKIN paces up and down.*

PARKIN. (*Muttering to himself*) Oh dear, oh dear ! Disgraced and ruined ! Bankrupt ! So much for Parkin's ! Old, old ! I've outlived my time. . . . (*He looks into the tobacco jar and finds it empty. He clears his throat. A silence*) Have you got your pouch on you, Tom ? (*TOM hands it to him silently*) Hey, hey, hey ! What would one do without one's tobacco at such a time as this ?

TOM. And seven's eleven and carry one.

PARKIN. All right, I won't talk. (*He lights his pipe*)

TOM. Two pound eleven and nine three-four.  
Why, it isn't even added up right, Father.

PARKIN. Isn't it, Tom ? I dare say not. I've been so worried these last months. (*Muttering to himself*) What'll Nancy do, I wonder. With her old father disgracing the family. . . . Oh dear, oh dear !

TOM. Tovey's haven't actually lodged a petition yet, have they ?

PARKIN. No, Tom, not actually. But it's only a question of time ; they've a judgment against me and I've got nothing to pay it with.

TOM. Why didn't you trust me, Father ? If we'd known of it sooner we might have done something perhaps.

PARKIN. Yes, yes. . . . How did you hear ?

TOM. When I went down to dinner there was a note waiting for me from Mr Applin.

PARKIN. Eh ?

TOM. From Albert, that is.

PARKIN. Yes, I made a clean breast of it to him ; I wrote him last night.

TOM. You might have let *me* know, your own son.

PARKIN. I thought with his experience as a chartered accountant . . . It's a very complicated business.

TOM. As soon as I'd had my tea, round I came. He said seven.

PARKIN. It's very good of you both. I told him to break it gently to Nancy.

TOM. Now are they all here ? Day-book, ledger . . .

PARKIN. Pass-book, stock-book . . . But we'd best not begin yet.

TOM. No, we'd better keep them till Mr Applin comes.

PARKIN. Albert, Tom.

TOM. Yes, yes. . . .

PARKIN. Your own sister's husband after all.

Oh dear, oh dear! And both of them so highly thought of, by the clergyman and everybody. It's lucky girls change their names when they marry; nobody need ever know that it's her father, when the newspapers get hold of it and everybody's talking.

(*A bell rings*)

TOM. That's probably him.

PARKIN. All right, I'll go.

TOM. As you please.

PARKIN (*opens the street door. The spring bell rings. It is raining*)

Enter ALBERT from the street, in a wet mackintosh cape; with a bicycle, which he stands in the shop.

PARKIN. Ah, it's you, Albert. It's very kind of you to come.

ALBERT. How do you do, Mr Parkin. It's a wretched night; but we must expect all sorts now.

PARKIN. Sure you're not wet?

ALBERT. No, no.

PARKIN. You're looking well; so brown and sunburnt!

ALBERT. (*Humorous*) Yes, it hasn't all got washed off yet.

PARKIN. And how's Nancy?

ALBERT. Quite well, thank you. Dreadfully cut up, of course. She would have come round too ; but she knew how you must be feeling about it.

PARKIN. And the children ?

ALBERT. Quite well, thank you. Bobby's got one of his sore throats, adenoids—the doctor thinks.

PARKIN. (*Impressed*) Adenoids ! (*They come down*) Here's Tom. (*Uncertain*) You . . .

ALBERT. Ah, how do you do, Tom ?

TOM. Quite well, thank you, er . . .

ALBERT. You got my note then ?

TOM. Yes. (*A pause*)

ALBERT. Well !

PARKIN. Well ! (*A pause*) How are things in the city ?

ALBERT. Quiet, very quiet, but what can you expect with the bank-rate as it is ?

PARKIN. True ! True !

ALBERT. Well, Mr Parkin, this is a sad business.

PARKIN. Yes, it's a sad business, a sad business ! It's very good of you and Tom. It's a lot of trouble, I know . . .

ALBERT. Not at all !

PARKIN. But the fact is (*with emotion*) I've . . . I've . . .

ALBERT. Yes, yes !

PARKIN. I've pretty well got to the end of my tether.

ALBERT. Yes, yes ; there comes a day, a sad day . . . So you couldn't carry on any further ?

PARKIN. Couldn't be done . . . Held out as long as I could . . . I've even pawned things. But it's no good ; my credit's gone ; I couldn't so much as get paper bags. We've had to do things up in screws of newspaper. It isn't for myself I mind so much ; but when I think of Nancy and the children . . . all I'd hoped to do for them, and then this ! Judgment signed and nothing, absolutely nothing !

ALBERT. Come, come ! You mustn't feel like that about it. You mustn't think Naney and me take it any way as a personal grievance. If Naney ever had any expectations, I can assure you it has never been the subject of conversation between us at any time. So don't let that weigh with you. No, it's you we're thinking of.

PARKIN. Oh, me ! What do I matter, an old fellow like me ? I haven't got long to live.

ALBERT. Nonsense ! You're good for another twenty years. But we'd always thought your little business was as sound as a bell.

TOM. Come, Father ! It's no good crying over spilt milk. We must have a look at the books and see what's what.

ALBERT. Yes, we must have a regular good go

in at them. (*Taking a book*) Now, what's been the method ? I must have a look.

PARKIN. Well, it's a bit complicated, I dare say.

ALBERT. I'm used to that. The more complicated a thing is, the better I like it ; you can't have a thing too complicated for me.

PARKIN. Everyone has their own ways. I'll explain things as we go along.

ALBERT. Now what's this, for instance ? Weston, Esq., nine, seven, six.

PARKIN. Mr Weston of 22 The Pleasance ?

ALBERT. Yes.

PARKIN. One of my best customers he was ; one of the sort that's always pleased. He used to say we had the best-stocked grocery this side of Lisson Grove, he said there was nowhere he could be so sure of getting the figs he liked.

ALBERT. But why isn't that ticked off ? It's two years old.

PARKIN. It was a bad debt ; he's gone away.

ALBERT. What do you mean by a bad debt ? There's always a reason for a bad debt being a bad debt.

PARKIN. He's dead.

ALBERT. But didn't you apply to the execs ?

PARKIN. Not in time ; they'd gone away too.

ALBERT. Hm ! Sargentson, 1 Acacia Row.

PARKIN. Wasn't that paid ?

ALBERT. Apparently not.

PARKIN. There was a good many debts we didn't get in at one time ; small accounts, you know ; we didn't bother.

ALBERT. Two, thirteen, four.

PARKIN. There was no one to send the bills out regular after my poor wife died. But I rather thought he'd paid, Albert.

ALBERT. (To Tom) Look in the cash-book.

TOM. What's the date ?

ALBERT. June, one nine oh nine.

TOM. It only comes down to February.

PARKIN. We didn't keep a regular cash-book after that. The stationer died ; the new people sold nothing but shoddy.

ALBERT. Hm ! Well, we must get all this into some sort of order. Is everything here ?

PARKIN. Pretty nearly everything.

ALBERT. Well, let's have everything. You never know. (PARKIN *fetches some papers*)

(To Tom) Things seem to be in a shocking mess.

TOM. What's this, Father ?

PARKIN. It's some bits of paper we used to use when the day-book was mislaid at one time. I've got some letters here that'll interest you ; customers that wrote about things they'd liked ; and a cutting from the *Advertiser* in reference to the catering for the Cricket Dinner. There's one from Jefferson offering to buy me out at practically any terms I

liked to name ; and one from Montagu's offering to lend me money on simple note of hand. I could have commanded any sum at that time. Nancy might like to see those.

ALBERT. We'd better put 'em with the rest at present.

PARKIN. (*To Tom*) I and your mother saw our way to a big thing then. We'd planned to extend the business little by little, like Mr Mortimer did at Pond's End with his drapery business.

TOM. Drapery's different.

PARKIN. (*Offended*) Why's drapery different ?

TOM. I don't know, but it is.

ALBERT. I don't find this account of Spires' entered anywhere in the ledger.

PARKIN. Spires ? Ah, I dare say not ; there isn't much in the ledger after April last year.

ALBERT. Oh, come, is that the way you kept accounts ?

PARKIN. There was nobody to do it ; the girl was always at the counter. (*To Tom*) The times we used to talk it over round the lamp of a night, your mother and I ; and work it out on paper, as exact as A B C. She had a wonderful belief in me had your mother. You're a regular Barnum, she used to say ; a regular Barnum. And we gave the children a good education too, didn't we, Tom ? Tom

at Mr Spence's and Nancy at the Church of England school. We held our heads high. Often and often I was offered to take the bag round at St John's.

ALBERT. What's this three pound thirteen to Trotterman ?

PARKIN. Oh, that's the ham-curer. A wild young fellow he was . . .

ALBERT. But I don't find anything corresponding in the stock-book for that year.

PARKIN. Drove out in his dog-cart of a Sunday ; always ready with his joke . . .

ALBERT. And three fifteen again in June.

PARKIN. Got into trouble with the women, and had to leave for the colonies without paying his debts.

ALBERT. But he seems to have done you.

PARKIN. Ah, he did everybody ! I wasn't the only one. . . . The first thing we meant to do was to make a speciality of tinned fish and meats ; put all the ordinary groceries in a separate department next door, and keep the whole shop here for tinned things, with the perishable goods, like ham and cheese, in the middle. Once we were started we meant to buy up Miss Hobley's wool-shop ; she'd have been glad ; and then the corn-chandler's, and so on, gradually extending and extending our premises right as far as the Mews. We thought of doing a bit in

fancy goods too as occasion offered, handbags and stationery, high-class toys, umbrellas, everything !

TOM. A regular Harrod's, eh ?

PARKIN. That's just what your mother said ; a regular Harrod's. Often and often we thought what name we'd call it ; the Portland Stores ; Parkin's Limited ; or simply Parkin Bros. I inclined to Parkin Bros. We were going to advertise. You can't do nothing without advertisement nowadays ; this is the age of advertisement. Some good catch phrase we wanted, that people would remember. I had thoughts of a sky-sign too ; a red light running across, and then a green one, flingin' the words Parkin Bros., like a challenge, right away to Primrose 'Ill. And a big poster by a crack firm ; something in the humorous line ; something that people would stop in the streets and laugh at. I had an idea for one : "The biggest retail grocer in London," and a picture of your poor old mother blockin' up the doorway. Lord, how she laughed when I told her ! The whole place seemed to shake. What times they were ! . . . But one obstacle grew up after another. The first thing was the laundry at the back that took over Miss Hobley's place unbeknown to us, and cut us off, so to speak, in the flank. There was no chance of ever

getting to the Mews after that, not for any money we might have offered. Still, we might have spread across the road ; we might have moved up into the High Street, or even into Circus Road. But then came the Mansions. It's the Mansions that has ruined us. As soon as ever I saw the first red brick I felt my qualms. Maria, I said, those Mansions'll be the end of us. And the end of us they was, though she never lived to see it. Towering up beside us as they did, the poorer folk from the back streets got shy of coming ; they fancied we catered for the rich people in the flats ; and the rich people in the flats didn't come because they thought we catered for the poor people in the back streets ; and so it goes round and round. After that it was one long series of misfortunes ; first came the drop in ham ; then came the packet system for soaps ; then came Lipton's and the 'Ome Colonial. That was the last straw. Everything seems to have gone wrong since your poor mother died. We put a good face on it at Christmas. We've always been known for our Christmas decorations. People would come from miles away by tram and omnibus to see our Christmas decorations. But last Christmas nobody seemed to care for them ; I could see it was the beginning of the end. People

seem to have lost their taste for gold paper and tasteful arrangement. Young folk want something more sensational nowadays ; something with figures of men standing in the snow with little electric lights in their hands ; it's an age of sensation ! I'm out of date ; nobody wants the old men now. And here am I, going down to my grave, ruined and disgraced, a bankrupt man . . .

ALBERT. Come, come, Mr Parkin, you mustn't give way ; you mustn't exaggerate. We must find out how bad things really are.

PARKIN. You'll never find out how bad things really are. I couldn't find out myself how bad things really are, not if I was to sit at it for a month of Sundays. The books don't show not half the real truth.

ALBERT. Have a cigarette—Egyptians.

PARKIN. No, thanks. I'd sooner have a pipe. (Tom *hands him his pouch*) Thank you, Tom.

ALBERT. You've done your best and no one can do more.

PARKIN. You're all so good about it.

ALBERT. You've been an idealist, Mr Parkin, that's what you've been.

PARKIN. Yes, I've always been an idealist.

ALBERT. What does the poet say ? " 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

PARKIN. Quite true.

ALBERT. You've done things on the grand scale.

PARKIN. Yes, I shouldn't wonder if it turns out, when all's said and done, that I've failed for close on a hundred pound ; yes, close on a hundred pound !

ALBERT. And now, Mr Parkin, since time is money, as they say, we must get on with this job. We'll stay here, Tom and I, all night if need be, eh, Tom ? and have a regular good go in at things.

PARKIN. It's really very good of you. Isn't it very inconvenient ?

ALBERT. Not a bit.

TOM. That's all right.

PARKIN. (To ALBERT) Are you sure you've not got any engagement ?

ALBERT. I was due at a whist drive, that's all. But I've arranged with Nancy if I'm not back by half-past eight, she'll go alone.

PARKIN. (*Drawing up a chair*) Well, if that's so . . . Now, where shall we begin ?

ALBERT. You'll pardon me, Mr Parkin, but the fact is that Tom and I had better get this done alone.

PARKIN. But you'll want me to explain things or you'll never . . .

ALBERT. There's nothing to explain. We shall get on best without your help.

PARKIN. That's all very fine, but I'm not going to be turned out !

ALBERT. Come, let's be frank about it, Mr Parkin. You've got everything into a hopeless muddle, and we've got to disentangle it as best we can.

TOM. He's quite right, Father ; you'd better go.

PARKIN. (*Angry*) Go ? Go where ?

TOM. Anywhere.

PARKIN. I *won't* go ! What are things coming to ? Do you think I'm going to leave my books for you two young fellows to make hay with ? Do you think that a business that it's taken me all these years to build up is going to be . . .

TOM. Oh, shut up, Father ! Let's all make it as easy for each other as we can.

ALBERT. Go for a walk ; go for a bus-ride ; have a drink at the Elephant and come back by Tube.

TOM. You sent for Albert ; let him do things his own way.

ALBERT. You want something to cheer you up. Go to a theatre ; go to a music hall ; something gay.

PARKIN. (*Defeated*) All right, I'll go, I'll go ! (*He takes his coat and hat from a peg and puts them on unwillingly*)

ALBERT. No offence, Mr Parkin.

PARKIN. No, no ! None taken. It's all right.

(*Muttering to himself*) I quite understand ; I'm old ; I'm not wanted now. Nobody wants an old man . . .

**TOM.** (*To ALBERT*) I don't expect he's got any money. I haven't got much on me ; only one and fourpence.

**ALBERT.** (*Producing money*) We'll make it up to half-a-crown. You give it him.

**TOM.** No, you.

**ALBERT.** You'd better. (*TOM shakes his head.*)

*ALBERT gives money to PARKIN* There, Mr Parkin. You go to the Pav. or the Tivoli. There's half-a-crown, and fourpence for the bus. Go and hear Harry Lauder or one of these funny chaps sing. Have a good laugh, that's what you want.

**PARKIN.** Thank you, thank you. (*Going*) All right, I'm going. (*Returning*) Just give me a load or two of tobacco for the evening, Tom ; I've run out. (*Helping himself*) You hardly notice how many pipes you *do* smoke some days.

**TOM.** Take the pouch.

**PARKIN.** No, thanks ; I'll just twist it up in this bit of paper. Thanks very much. I like this stuff ; it's nice and cool to the tongue. . . . Then I'll think of you two working away at the books while I'm down there enjoying myself. Well, good-bye ! So long, Tom !

ALBERT. Good-bye.

TOM. Good-night, Father.

PARKIN. (*Opening the street door and pausing on the threshold to look out at the rain*) Hm !

TOM. Got your umbrella ?

PARKIN. Yes, thanks ; I've got my umbrella all right.

[*Puts it up and Exit*

(TOM and ALBERT sit. A pause)

ALBERT. Poor old chap ! He would only have been in the way.

TOM. Well, where shall we begin ?

ALBERT. (*Pushing the ledger away*) They won't help. We must just value the stock and try and find out what his liabilities really are.

CURTAIN

# THE TWO TALISMANS

*A Comedy in One Act*

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

HAFIZ      }  
HARIRI    } *two old sages*

SAOUD      }  
ABULFEDA    } *two young carpet merchants*

ZAÏDA, *a princess*

A MESSENGER

THE MARSHAL OF THE CITY

*Elders, citizens, attendants of ZAÏDA, minstrels and  
dancing maidens*

## THE TWO TALISMANS

SCENE : *On a hill-top outside an Arabian city. The back-cloth displays an Oriental landscape with the roofs of the city peeping R., low down, among trees. A knoll L. Below it the entrance of HAFIZ's hut. Still lower by the proscenium, a log on which two can sit. Rocks R.C. Pathway L., above the knoll, to the country ; pathway R. to the city. Evening.*

HAFIZ sits at the door of his hut smoking a hookah.

Enter HARIRI L., with staff ; he carries a big bunch of roses.

HARIRI. (*Salaaming C.*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom !

HAFIZ. (*Rising and salaaming*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom !

HARIRI. May the shadow of the palm-tree ever rest upon your dwelling.

HAFIZ. May its fruit ever lend vigour to your limbs. Whence come you ?

HARIRI. From wandering in my rose-garden, of which I bring you the first-fruits (*Giving him his roses*)

HAFIZ. May the graciousness of the gift be rewarded with plenty on its source.

HARIRI. (*Sitting R.C.*) What a blessed thing is old age, Hafiz, that we can sit at peace upon

the hills, while the rest of mankind is toiling in the city at our feet.

HAFIZ. All day the sound of trumpeting and turmoil is wafted to these heights, like the roaring of the sea to the ear of an old mariner, sheltering snugly in his cottage on the cliff.

HARIRI. I hear it even now. What special tumult holds the citizens to-day ?

HAFIZ. Have you forgotten, Hariri ? The year of mourning is now ended for the death of Suleimân our king. To-day the citizens rejoice, and the Elders are met to elect his successor.

HARIRI. Far from us be all such matters !

HAFIZ. Truly, we stand too near to death ourselves to mourn or rejoice overmuch in his victories and discomfitures, even in the palaces of kings.

HARIRI. Uneoneerned by such trifles, let us resume our daily discourse of wisdom.

HAFIZ. Philosophy is the noblest ornament of the aged.

HARIRI. Of what subject shall we reason this pleasant afternoon ?

HAFIZ. Come, let us debate of human happiness if you will.

HARIRI. A well-chosen subject for the occasion !

It is a pity only that there is no one by to overhear our discourse, for it is the subject of all men's daily thought.

HAFIZ. And one on which we can surely undertake to speak with knowledge, having both of us so much cause for contentment.

HARIRI. Truly said, for have we not everything that a man can desire in his old age ? I fear only that our debate may fail for want of disagreement.

HAFIZ. Have we not both good health, good reputation, and a measure of wisdom such as is given to few ?

HARIRI. All this is true : to say nothing of our property.

HAFIZ. Our property ?

HARIRI. Have you not your vineyard, and I my rose-garden, which supplies me all the year with perfumes ?

HAFIZ. Why, as for these, I set little store by such trifles. The grape juice has a pleasant savour and perfumes add a certain delicacy to existence ; yet a man's happiness does not depend on outward circumstances, but only on the cheerfulness of his disposition.

HARIRI. Oh, there you speak a little wildly for a philosopher, Hafiz. Truly, without contentment, a man can take no pleasure in the benefits bestowed by Heaven, but I account it an ill return for the goodness of Allah to despise the blessings which he sends.

HAFIZ. Of what value is a man's contentment if a trifling accident can overthrow it ?

HARIRI. Why do we call good good, if it be no better than evil?

HAFIZ. The contented man bends evil to his own good.

HARIRI. If a man smile when he is in pain, I call him a good actor, not a contented man.

HAFIZ. And I call him a sage, for a smile can conquer fate.

HARIRI. Come, this is no matter for the idle asseveration of opposite opinions, but rather one that can be settled by putting it to the test.

HAFIZ. How may this be done?

HARIRI. I have the very means at hand. All my life, as you know, I have been a collector of curious trifles such as amulets and charms. (*Opening a pouch at his girdle*) Here in this wallet I have two talismans, both of marvellous efficacy, which I bought for a heavy price from an old wizard of Bagdad. Behold them! Mark the tranquil gleam of this blue amethyst.

HAFIZ. (*Going R.C. and sitting by HARIRI*) It is like the eye of a wise old fish, meditating among the rushes by the light of the full moon.

HARIRI. He who receives this amethyst will enjoy perpetual good luck in all his dealings. Now see the malignant glimmer of this blood-red ruby.

**HAFIZ.** It is like the eye of a witch's cat, blinking evilly by the embers of a dying fire.

**HARIRI.** He to whom this is given will have nothing but misfortune in all his ways.

**HAFIZ.** Are you not afraid to possess such powerful talismans ?

**HARIRI.** They have no efficacy for those who buy them with gold and silver : but only for those to whom they are freely given. Come, take the ruby !

**HAFIZ.** (*Starting back*) No, no !

**HARIRI.** Ha, ha, you are afraid !

**HAFIZ.** Far from me be such empty fears ! I refuse it only because I have devised a more excellent plan to settle our dispute. Let us go forth and seek two men of opposite dispositions, a contented man and a discontented. To the discontented man you shall give the amethyst, that Fortune may shower her benefits upon him ; to the contented man you shall give the ruby, that he may taste the bitterness of adversity. And I warrant you that in the end, for all his blessings, you shall find the grumbler discontented still ; and the contented man triumphant over his afflictions, though they be countless as the seeds of the pomegranate.

**HARIRI.** Vain illusion, my Hafiz ! I am convinced, on the contrary, that prosperity will so sweeten the one and adversity so sour the

other, that in the end their characters will be totally changed.

**HAFIZ.** The sky and sea will sooner change their places, or the ring-dove and the serpent their dispositions.

**HARIRI.** Why, Hafiz, if you be so confident in your belief and set so little store by outward goods, will you not back your opinion with a wager ?

**HAFIZ.** With any wager that you will.

**HARIRI.** My rose-garden, then, against your vineyard that I am right.

**HAFIZ.** Agreed !

**HARIRI.** Come, let us go forth and seek these persons whom you have described.

**HAFIZ.** (*Taking a staff that leans against the house*) Let us go forth at once.

**HARIRI.** (*Looking off up L.*) But softly, for I see two men approaching this spot.

**HAFIZ** (*Looking off*) Saoud and Abulfeda, if I mistake not, young carpet merchants of the city; returning home, without a doubt, from selling their goods in some market of the neighbourhood.

**HARIRI.** Let us stay awhile, and hearken to their conversation.

(*HAFIZ and HARIRI sit side by side, staff in hand, on the log down L.*)

*Enter SAoud up L., as if climbing a hill.*  
*ABULFEDA follows, carrying a load on his back.*

SAOUD. Ah, I am weary with this tedious journey !

ABULFEDA. It will soon be ended.

SAOUD. Not soon enough for me. Come, let us ease the pains of our jaded limbs beneath these trees a little before we go farther.

ABULFEDA. (*Putting down his load*) How sweet and fresh the perfume of the evening air !

SAOUD. My nose is too stifled with the stinking dust of the road to perceive it.

ABULFEDA. (*Sitting R.C.*) Ah, the pleasure of sitting at last !

SAOUD. (*The same*) What, on these rocks ? You are easily pleased.

ABULFEDA. How delightful to linger in the shade even for a moment.

SAOUD. And yet how painful that we must so soon go forth into the sunshine to blister our feet once more upon the road.

ABULFEDA. Why, all these things are trifles to me when I think of our great good fortune in selling our wares in Agmassân for twice their value.

SAOUD. Rejoice if you will ! As for me, I am tortured by the thought that if we had gone to another village we might perhaps have sold them for three times what they cost.

HAFIZ. We need go no farther than this spot to settle our dispute, Hariri. For here, if I

mistake not, we have found the contented man and the discontented that we sought.

HARIRI. In good truth, these two shall decide our wager for us. (*Advancing towards SAoud and ABULFEDA*) Peace be on you, my sons.

ABULFEDA. (*Rising*) And on you, our Father.

HARIRI. (*Salaaming*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom !

ABULFEDA and SAoud. (*Together, salaaming*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom !  
(ABULFEDA kisses HARIRI'S hand)

HARIRI. Surely Allah is kind that he has sent you in my path at such an opportune moment.

ABULFEDA. It is we that are blessed in the encounter, gentle friend.

SAoud. What would you with us, old man ?

HARIRI. A favour.

SAoud. A favour ?

HARIRI. You two can discharge me from the obligation of an oath which I have sworn by the bones of the Prophet, on whose name be peace.

ABULFEDA. Our good-will is at your service, O venerable Effendi.

SAoud. Speak for yourself. We have obligations enough of our own without taking fresh obligations on our shoulders.

HARIRI. It is but a small service that I require of you.

SAoud. Let us hear it without too many words.

HARIRI. It is no more than to receive a gift.

SAOUD. A gift? That's a different matter, though a gift from a stranger is always a suspicious thing. What motive is concealed beneath this appearance of generosity?

HARIRI. Know then that this day, having unwittingly overslept the hour of morning prayer, I have vowed to make penance for my sloth by giving my two best jewels to the first strangers who should pass this way. To you, Abulfeda, I therefore give this ruby.

ABULFEDA. Thanks, noble sheikh; it is of all jewels the one that I love best.

HARIRI. To you, Saoud, this amethyst.

SAOUD. Sir, I accept it since you wish, though I prize amethysts far less than rubies. Still, I will not reject the gift, since you hope to benefit by the giving of it. (To ABULFEDA) There is probably some flaw in the jewels or he would not part with them so readily.

HARIRI. (Down L. to HAFIZ) The talismans are safely delivered and if you will be patient for a few days, or it may be but a few hours, our dispute will be settled without further trouble.

*Enter a MESSENGER R., from the city.*

MESSENGER. (*Salaaming*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom!

ABULFEDA. (*Salaaming*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom!

SAOUD. (*Looking round and touching his forehead grudgingly*) Salaam ! Even our short hour of repose is disturbed with continual greetings.

ABULFEDA. May your years be many and prosperous.

MESSENGER. May you grow younger day by day. Are you not Saoud and Abulfeda of the street of the carpet merchants ?

ABULFEDA. I am Abulfeda at your command, gracious stranger, and this is my friend Saoud. In what can our unworthiness serve you ?

MESSENGER. I am the bearer of news to both.

SAOUD. Bad news, without a doubt.

MESSENGER. Far from it, if you be indeed Saoud.

SAOUD. Speak your tidings without superfluous ornaments of rhetoric and let me be the judge.

MESSENGER. Aminâ, the old widow, the richest in all the city, is dead, and has left all her vast wealth to you.

SAOUD. To me ?

MESSENGER. May the increase of Allah rest upon it !

ABULFEDA. Why, this is good news indeed !

MESSENGER. There is but one condition attached to the enjoyment of this fortune.

SAOUD. A condition ? I thought as much ! What is it ?

MESSENGER. That you support, during the

scanty remnant of his life, the aged steward who has tended Aminâ's property to such good effect.

SAOUD. How old is he ?

MESSENGER. He is verging on ninety-three.

SAOUD. A tough old man ! I know these pensioners : he will live for ever.

MESSENGER. For you too, Abulfeda, I am the bringer of news, less joyful than these I fear.

ABULFEDA. A messenger is not to blame for the quality of his tidings.

MESSENGER. Nor the unfortunate man for the evil that befalls him. This very day, in your absence, your house caught fire and was burnt to the ground.

ABULFEDA. My house burnt down ? O Allah, my little house ! Come, tell me, was nothing saved ?

MESSENGER. Only your bedstead.

ABULFEDA. My bedstead saved ? Of all my possessions that on which I set most store. By what fortunate chance did my bedstead escape destruction ?

MESSENGER. Your neighbours dragged it out, a little singed, from the conflagration.

ABULFEDA. Good comes of evil, since it has been the occasion for my neighbours to show their good-will to me.

MESSENGER. But all your other household goods have perished.

ABULFEDA. Why, what matter, since I have my bedstead ? The weather is fine ; I can sleep under a tree ; it is cleaner and less troublesome than a house.

SAOUD. (*To the MESSENGER*) Come, fellow, if your message is delivered, what need to stand loitering here ?

ABULFEDA. (*Giving the MESSENGER money*) Even the bearer of ill tidings is worthy of a recompense for the trouble of their delivery.

MESSENGER. I thank you, sir. May Allah lighten all our burdens !

[*Exit MESSENGER R.*

ABULFEDA. A kind-hearted fellow, worthy of more than I could spare.

SAOUD. Here's fine news to greet us on our return from this toilsome expedition ! You with your fire, and I with my so-called heritage.

ABULFEDA. What, are you still cast down ?

SAOUD. Why should I be otherwise ?

ABULFEDA. Are you not now the possessor of a most unexpected fortune ?

SAOUD. A fortune indeed ! How can you call my heritage a fortune, when it is loaded with such encumbrances as these ? Whatever pleasure I might have derived from this accession of wealth is utterly spoilt for me by the thought of this wretched old steward . . .

ABULFEDA. A man of ninety-three.

SAOUD. A fellow of extravagant tastes, I doubt not, whom I must support in idleness until he choose to die.

HAFIZ. (*To HARIRI*) Was I not right, Hariri ? Has prosperity sugared the disposition of this man, or adversity soured that of his companion ? Come, give me fifty sequins, and I will release you from your wager.

(*The sound of melancholy music and the monotonous chant of women approaches from the city R.*)

HARIRI. The palm-date does not grow sweet, nor the aloe bitter, in an hour. Be patient yet awhile, for by these strains of music I divine the approach of some lady of noble birth afflicted with sorrow. Let us see how these matters will end.

*Enter ZAÏDA, borne by negroes in a palankeen. Minstrels and maidens form a procession about her, playing and singing.*

ZAÏDA. Set down the palankeen and help me to alight. Come, leave these strains of grief and tune your lutes to sounds of joy ; for the sorrow of fruitless search is ended at last in the happiness of finding those whom I have sought.

(*ZAÏDA alights and stands on the knoll up L., wrapped in heavy garments. ATTENDANTS raise a big sunshade over her ; OTHERS fan her ; OTHERS bring her sherbet and refreshments. The MUSICIANS play a less melancholy strain*)

ABULFEDA. (*Speaking through the music*) See, Saoud ! What vision of loveliness is this which sheds its radiance on our eyes ? Surely it is some houri strayed from the flowery lawns of Paradise ! Behold ! Her eye is black and dreamy like the eye of a fallow-doe ; her face is like the full moon rising over a lake among the orange groves ; every glance awakens a thousand sighs in my bosom, and I could almost swoon for love.

SAOUD. She has indeed a symmetrical visage ; but she is so enveloped in wrappings that I very much suspect her to be hunchbacked and deformed.

ZAÏDA. (*To her ATTENDANTS*) Come, remove these garments of lamentation that I may appear before those whom I love in the full splendour of my beauty.

(ATTENDANTS *unrobe her*)

ABULFEDA. See, the robes fall from her shoulders, like clouds scattered by the glory of the morning sun. Her figure is like a slender larch-tree, poised on a mountain slope ; and she sways in walking like a flowering rush in running water.

SAOUD. In truth, she is a shapely damsel, whose beauty is not greatly blemished even by that little mole which I perceive on the side of her neck.

ABULFEDA. The peace of Allah rest upon you, lady !

SAOUD and ABULFEDA. (*Salaaming*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom !

ZAÏDA. And on you also be peace and welcome, Saoud and Abulfeda.

ABULFEDA. Madam, our names are for ever hallowed, having once passed through the scented gateway of your lips.

ZAÏDA. Your gentle greeting banishes the shame which would otherwise have overwhelmed me at the boldness of the expedition on which I am bound.

ABULFEDA. The dignity of your bearing shields you from the consequence of any imprudence better than a thousand eunuchs.

ZAÏDA. Know then, Saoud and Abulfeda, that for many months, unseen myself, I have watched you from my golden lattice as you went about the city ; and a fire of love has been kindled in my heart, which wedlock alone, though it can never assuage it, can alone render endurable. Having long cherished the intention of making myself known to you, I have been hindered from my purpose, not so much by the modesty natural to maidenhood, as by the impossibility of deciding to which of the two my heart was most inclined. But to-day I have resolved, rather than see the flower of my youth wither

in dervish-like solitude, to let the competing charms of your persons and conversations decide an uncertainty which has at last become intolerable. Since break of day I have gone sorrowfully up and down among my maidens, seeking you in vain through the ways of the city ; and now, having found you, I am fully determined that yonder sun shall not sink to his rest before the strains of the bridal hymn salute the blushing dawn of my lifelong union with one or other of you two.

ABULFEDA. Ah, woe is me ! At last then is our misfortune complete, and I see that Allah is determined to punish us for the levity of the oath which once we swore in a drunken frolic !

ZAÏDA. What oath is this ?

ABULFEDA. O lotus-flower, moulded of mother-o'-pearl, and scented with finest ambergris, know that once, as I and Saoud sat in the house of a Greek merchant, enjoying the forbidden delights of wine, among the company assembled sat also Djavid ben Hassan, the Court poet, who, seizing a lute that lay in a corner, improvised quatrains celebrating the beauty of the Princess Zaïda, daughter of King Suleimân, with such tuneful eloquence that the birds of heaven gathered to listen by the lattice of the window, and we,

enraptured with love at the hearing of her praises, swore a senseless and audacious oath by the beard of the Prophet, on whose name be peace, that we would go celibate and childless to our graves, unless some freak of fortune should enable us to wed that peerless Princess herself. For myself, the misfortune entailed by this wanton vow is perhaps only illusory, since the poverty to which I am condemned would in any case have compelled me to content myself with some one-eyed and elderly widow, and excluded me from the delights of youth and beauty till I had entered the gates of Paradise. But I lament for my friend Saoud, whose wealth, but for his oath, would have enabled him to aspire beyond his merits to the service of a beauty which no man yet born could in truth be worthy to enjoy.

ZAÏDA. Sir, your words are amiable and your modesty touches my heart. But I must tell you that your flattering response to the sentiment of which you were so lately one of the objects comes too late. For the painful hesitancy which had so long tormented my bosom was suddenly resolved, but a moment since, as if by the spell of a magician, in favour of your friend. Your features are indeed those of a handsome and well-bred man ; but those of your companion seem to

me to be those of an all-conquering god of love. Your words are indeed felicitous and betoken a well-balanced mind; but your companion's silence has an eloquence for me, compared to which your speech is like the noise of bull-frogs croaking in the pauses of the song of a nightingale, singing in an enchanted garden. It is Saoud and Saoud alone who can give me the happiness which I desire. (*To SAoud*) Speak, ruler of my destiny, and relieve me from the intolerable burden of anxiety which oppresses me.

**SAoud.** Madam, your beauty has so bewildering an effect upon my senses that, if it be the true index of your character and not a mask concealing a malicious disposition, I could willingly reconcile myself, in the pleasure of your company, even to the unsavoury-smelling city in which I am compelled to dwell. Believe me that, save for my oath and the dread of retribution for the breach of it, I would willingly accept, for the sake of the first delights of your affection, the possible weariness of satiety which might ensue.

**Zaïda.** Know then, Saoud, that you may still crown the desire of both our hearts, and yet preserve your oath inviolate. For I myself am no other than that same Zaïda, daughter of King Suleimân, with too flattering a report of whose charms Djavid the Court

musician once beguiled the intervals of your revelry.

ABULFEDA. The Princess Zaïda !

SAOUD. What, do I at last behold the Princess herself ?

ABULFEDA. O thrice-blessed hour in which my eyes feast themselves on beauty of which even the verses of Djavid were but a profanation and a libel !

(SAOUD and ABULFEDA prostrate themselves)

ZAÏDA. (To SAOUD) Rise, idol of my heart, and let no ceremonies of empty deference delay the fulfilment of my wishes. Return to the city to make such preparations as may be necessary, and let us celebrate our wedding without more ado.

SAOUD. Madam, since it is your wish, I hearken and obey. After all my troubles, I at last enjoy a moment of unalloyed contentment.

ZAÏDA. A moment ? Henceforth, during the continuance of our united lives, I look forward to the unremitting joys of Paradise for at least fifty-one weeks in every year.

SAOUD. Fifty-one weeks ? Why only fifty-one ? What sorrow then is destined to cast its shadow on the fifty-second ?

ZAÏDA. In the midst of pleasure I must not forget the duties of a daughter. As my Father lay dying a year ago, I vowed by his bedside that one week in every year I would go

with my maidens and make lamentation on his tomb.

SAOUD. What, for a whole week ?

ZAÏDA. But once a year.

SAOUD. By what right could he exact so great a sacrifice of his future son-in-law ?

ABULFEDA. By Allah, Princess, I bless the hour in which you showed so signal an instance of filial piety. For though condemned by my oath to lifelong celibacy, I can still rejoice in the thought that, once in every year, I may yet behold your shrouded form, as you pass by my tree on your way to the royal sepulchre.

SAOUD. A week ! A whole week ! Ah, the thought of that week embitters all the delight which I had promised myself in your society. The whole year will be poisoned for me by the anticipation of our approaching separation.

HAFIZ. (To HARIRI) See, Hariri, your amethyst fellow is not contented yet. Come, for a hundred sequins I will release you from your wager.

(*The sound of trumpets comes from the city pathway R.*)

HARIRI. Wait yet a while, for by the sound of trumpets I mark the approach of some person in high authority. And, if I mistake not, yonder comes the Marshal of the City, attended by the Council of the Elders, and a crowd of citizens. What can this portend ?

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*Enter TRUMPETERS and HERALDS R.; then  
ELDERS and CITIZENS in procession, headed by  
the MARSHAL OF THE CITY. A blast is sounded  
on the trumpets.*

MARSHAL. In the name of the Elders of the City  
and the Empire, I command silence while I  
make proclamation.

SAOUD. A week! a whole week!

MARSHAL. Hearken, citizens and true be-  
lievers! The Council of the Elders, gathered  
to-day in anxious conclave to elect a successor  
to Sulcimân our king, on whose ashes be  
peace (ALL *bow*), casting aside all courtly  
prejudice and seeking only the welfare of  
the nation entrusted to its care, has fixed its  
choice at last on one, whose nobility is at-  
tested, not by the dying echo of the prowess  
of legendary ancestors, but by the fresh and  
unembellished record of his own personal  
worth. And we command you all, under  
pain of instant and painful death, to do  
homage and obeisance to him whom we have  
chosen. Saoud, son of Abu Hussein, stand  
forth!

SAOUD. I? Wherefore? Of what offence have  
I then been guilty?

MARSHAL. Of no offence, primordial fountain of  
noble blood. Thanks, not to the discernment  
of the Elders of the Council, but only to the  
conspicuous grace and merit of your character

which rendered all other choice impossible, it is on you that the election has fallen. Long live King Saoud the First ! In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom !

ALI. (*Salaaming*) In the name of the Prophet, salaam-aleykoom !

ABULFEDA. Now Allah be praised for this beneficence ! Surely I am blessed above others, to see my nearest friend not only wedded to the loveliest woman in all Arabia, but also raised to the splendour of a throne !

MARSHAL. Come, chamberlains, bring forth the robes and regalia, that his Majesty may return to his capital in such state as befits him amid the acclamations of the rejoicing populace. (*Trumpets and music. The robes and crown are brought out and put on SAoud.*) ALL prostrate themselves. SAoud grimaces as the crown is put on his head ; takes it off again and tries it in different positions) As for you, Abulfeda, the Cadi is so enraged at your carelessness in letting your house catch fire . . .

ABULFEDA. My carelessness ? But I was absent from the city !

MARSHAL. No matter ; your house abuts on his. He has commanded that you be stripped of all your possessions and sold into slavery.

ABULFEDA. What, sold into slavery ?

MARSHAL. The decree is irrevocable. (To ATTENDANTS) Bring forth the chains!

(*Chains are brought and fixed on ABULFEDA's limbs*)

ABULFEDA. What, chains too? Ah, woe is me! What upright man has never said Alas, or what hiding-place is there from destiny? Yet why should I repine? Have not the holiest of the saints suffered even worse indignities than this? And may not a wise man taste felicity even as a slave? At least I shall have a roof again to cover my slumbers and food no worse than the cattle which I tend. Come, chain the other leg!

MARSHAL. One leg must still be left free, that the whip-bearers may drive you to the market-place.

ABULFEDA. Now Allah be praised! I shall still have one leg free to dance at the wedding of my belovèd.

SAOUD. Come, tell me the extent and nature of the domains over which I am to rule.

MARSHAL. O great King, your sway extends over all those countries which your predecessor ruled; over smiling valleys of corn and pastures full of lusty kine, knee-deep in luscious herbage; over all but the little province of Baristân, which he has bequeathed to his widows for their sustenance.

SAOUD. What! A whole province taken from

me at a blow? What manner of province is this?

MARSHAL. A narrow range of barren rocks, where a few lean goats seek a scanty pasture in vain.

SAOUD. A province, a whole province for his widows!

*Enter MESSENGER R.*

MESSENGER. Abulfeda, I have heavy news for you. Your house, in burning, set fire to the Cadi's cattle-yard, and for this, in place of your former sentence, you are condemned to die.

ABULFEDA. To die!

MESSENGER. But he is merciful as well as just, and lets you select the manner of your execution. You may choose whether you will be impaled or burnt or drowned.

ABULFEDA. Now Allah be praised that even in the hour of my death my good fortune pursues me, and I may choose the manner of my end!

SAOUD. (*To himself*) The thought that I am deprived of the province of Baristân quite poisons all the pleasure that I derive from being so unexpectedly made King.

ZAÏDA. (*Approaching him and kissing his hand*) Come, my beloved, chase these clouds from your godlike brow!

SAOUD. (*To himself*) A whole province!

ZAÏDA. Surely the King is greater than the Cadi, and your word can undo the cruel misfortune which has cast its shadow on your wedding-day.

SAOUD. The Cadi ? Of what misfortune do you speak ?

ZAÏDA. Of the inequitable sentence passed upon your friend.

SAOUD. Ah, Zaïda, do not harass me with trifles at such a moment ! I should ill begin my reign by thwarting the ends of justice with an act of personal favouritism. Come, Abulfeda, if you must die, there is no need that yonder ruby should perish with you. If your vanity seeks adornment even in the hour of death, take this amethyst in its place: it has brought me nothing but misfortune.

ABULFEDA. (*Exchanging jewels with him*) Take the ruby, and welcome. (*To the MARSHAL*) Come, I am ready to suffer for my crimes.

SAOUD. I'll be even with these grasping widows yet ! I am not to be cheated so easily of a province.

ZAÏDA. (*Laughing*) Ha, ha, ha, ha ! Ho, ho, ho, ho !

SAOUD. What matter for laughter do you find here ?

ZAÏDA. Surely some mischievous Efreet had cast a spell upon my senses, that ever I

thought I loved so pitiful a clown as this ! What, here is one man rejoicing because he can choose the manner of his death, and another, but an instant King, lamenting because a parasang of pebbles is lopped from his dominions. Ha, ha, ha, ha !

ALL. (*Laughing*) Ha, ha, ha, ha !

ZAÏDA. What say you, citizens, are you contented to see this cheerful fellow put to death for singeing the Cadi's pigs ?

CITIZENS. No, no !

ZAÏDA. Or this grumbler made King over you ?

CITIZENS. Never !

ZAÏDA. Then a fig for the Cadi and the Council of Elders ! Let Abulfeda be released from his bonds, and let this other fellow go about his business.

ALL. Hurrah ! Hurrah ! Strip him of his robes !  
We'll not have Saoud for our King !

MARSHAL. In truth there must have been some malicious enchantment at work, to make us choose this crabbed churl to be our ruler. What say you, fellow-Elders, shall we not rescind our choice ?

ELDERS. Away with Saoud ! Let him depart and return no more !

(SAOUD is stripped of his robes and crown, which are laid at the MARSHAL's feet)

ZAÏDA. Come, Abulfeda, the scales have now fallen from my eyes. There has been some

wizardry in the air this hour past, or I could not so grievously have mistaken the true meaning of the impulse of my heart. Let a lifetime of tender transports repay you for an hour of unmerited neglect.

**ABULFEDA.** (*Prostrating himself at her feet*) Flower of Eden, mine eyes are blinded by your condescension, and my utterance is choked with tears of joy.

**ZAÏDA.** (*Kissing his head*) Rise, beloved ; and let the honeyed water of your eyes fall on a fruitfuller soil than this barren earth.

(**ABULFEDA** *kisses ZAÏDA's hands, rises and kisses her lips*)

**HAFIZ.** (*Rising and advancing*) Hearken, gracious lady, and you, O Citizens and Elders of the City ! If any wizardry or enchantments have for a moment led your wits astray, let me confess that I and this harmless sage (*indicating HARIRI*) have been the causes of it ; and let the happy issue of your bewilderments excuse their origin. The undeserved good fortune of Saoud and the unmerited afflictions of Abulfeda have alike proceeded from the possession of two talismans of contrary virtue, which we bestowed on them in order to decide a wager between us.

**SAOUD.** (*Throwing down the ruby*) A trick ! I thought as much. Take back your gifts !

**MARSHAL.** (*To HAFIZ*) Far from reproaching

you for what you have done, O venerable sheikh, we owe you our best thanks ; for since prosperity and adversity are alike the touchstones of true character, your talismans have enabled us to discover not only who was unworthy, but also who was worthy to be our King. What say you, Elders ? Whom can we find more deserving of our allegiance than Abulfeda, whose constancy has overcome misfortunes which would have overwhelmed a lesser man ?

ELDERS. Agreed ! Let Abulfeda be our King.

CITIZENS. Bismillah ! Let Abulfeda be our King !

MARSHAL. (*Signing to ATTENDANTS, who bring the robes and regalia*) Come, Abulfeda, in the name of the Council and the people I set this crown upon your head. May you live many years to teach them the secret of that cheerfulness of which you are the master.

ALL. Long live King Abulfeda the First !

(*Prostrating themselves*) In the name of the Prophet, salutation !

ABULFEDA. May Allah make me worthy of your greetings. (*To HARIRI*) Having achieved all that it is possible to desire, not by my own merits, but by the virtue of your talisman, let me now return it to its true owner.

ZAÏDA. Far be it from me to let my Lord part

with so powerful an amulet, seeing that my fortunes are now intertwined with his.

HARIRI. Far be it also from me to accept it again ; for where could it more fitly shine than in the head-dress of the King, in whose prosperity all his subjects grow fat ?

ABULFEDA. Far from me also to cross the wishes of my bride or to reject a gift so graciously insisted on.

HARIRI. I willingly confess that you have won your wager, Hafiz. Here are the keys of my rose-garden, which is henceforth no longer mine, but yours.

(HAFIZ *smilingly salaams and accepts the keys ; then Exit to the house, from which he presently returns carrying a heavy bag*)

ZAÏDA. As for you, Saoud, depart quickly from the confines of this city, and let your shadow no more blacken the sunshine of our roads.

ALL. Begone, begone !

SAOUD. What, must I go without even visiting my abode to collect my property ?

ZAÏDA. Begone at once, or by the beard of the Prophet, I will not answer for your life.

ALL. Begone ! begone ! or we will slay you.

HAFIZ. No one here seems pleased with you but myself, Saoud. But since you have won me a wager (*giving him the bag*) take this bag of sequins with you and depart in peace.

ZAÏDA. It is a greater bounty than he deserves.

SAOUD. (*Shouldering the bag and going*) Allah preserve us! What a burden to carry on my journey!

[*Exit SAOUD L.*

HAFIZ. Since a wedding is the fitting season of gifts, Hariri, take back the keys of your rose-garden, for I'll have none of them.

HARIRI. They were fairly lost and won.

HAFIZ. Tush, man! Take them or you'll have nothing left to wager, when next you venture to dispute philosophy with me. And now let the minstrels play and the maidens dance; for I am determined to stay revelling here till cock-crow proclaims the return of day.

(ABULFEDA and ZAÏDA sit on the knoll, with the ELDERS grouped about them. A GIRL crowns them and the two SAGES with garlands. MUSICIANS squat all round the stage playing, while some of ZAÏDA's MAIDENS sing; OTHERS dance. HAFIZ joins in the dance, gaily but with dignity; while all the rest laugh and clap their hands in time to the music)

CURTAIN

# THE LAMP

*A Drama in One Act*

## CHARACTERS

THEOPHANES

MYRRHINA, *wife to Theophanes*

YANOULA, *their son, a fair, handsome boy of nine  
or ten*

KOLÓNIMOS, *a merchant, sleek and prosperous*

## THE LAMP

SCENE : *Outside a rough open hut in the forest. A lamp above a rude altar in a corner of the hut. There is an inner chamber beyond. Soft "Arabian Night" evening sky.*

THEOPHANES, *an ascetic of about forty two or three.*

MYRRHINA, *a beautiful woman of about twenty-eight or thirty.*

THEOPHANES. (*Seated on a fallen tree trunk*) Woe, woe, woe !

MYRRHINA. Be comforted, Theophanes ; let us trust in the goodness of the Lord.

THEOPHANES. What comfort is there, when I see my vow broken, my life's task come to naught ? That day when first I heard the tent-maker preaching the good news in the market-place, when I left the service of our pagan devils and my eyes were opened to the true faith, that day I lighted this lamp and vowed to keep it always burning to the glory of God. Since then, in ceaseless vigil, in the city and in the forest, I have ever tended it, a symbol of the living faith, still flaming in a wicked world ; never once has the fire of it been quenched.

And now I see my work all like to perish : for what ? For the want of a little oil to feed the lamp. How say you ? Is the last jar nearly empty ?

MYRRHINA. There is not a finger's depth in it.

THEOPHANES. And no money left ?

MYRRHINA. All spent.

THEOPHANES. Nothing to sell ?

MYRRHINA. Nothing. At Epiphany I sold the last of those poor trinkets which, in my vanity, I kept and hid beneath my sackcloth when I fled from my father's palace.

THEOPHANES. (*Tenderly*) Ah, princess, my first disciple, better hadst thou stayed there. For thy palace and thy splendour what have I given thee ? A hermitage and a broken vow.

MYRRHINA. You have given me happiness such as falls to the lot of few. When first you stood before my father's gates among the angry soldiers, holding your lamp on high and calling to repentance ; when first I looked down upon you from the gilded fretwork of the windows, I was happy, for I said : I have seen a man. When the women mocked my daily vigil I was happy ; when I cast off my princely robes and followed you forth, I was happier still ; happiest since we left the city to dwell in these woodland solitudes, labouring always, feeding on the wild roots and nuts of the forest.

Has it not been happiness to me to see your glory growing day by day ? To see the miracle wrought among the people of the city by the fame of your steadfastness ? Has it not

been happiness to see the pilgrims, in ever-increasing numbers, climbing the hill as to a shrine to do reverence to yonder lamp and to the holy man that tends it ?

And now, if it go out, has not its flame lighted a flame in a thousand bosoms that will never die ?

THEOPHANES. But what of my vow ?

MYRRHINA. If God needed your vow, he would send you the means to fulfil your vow. No, though your vow fail, yet shall we still continue in the joy of his blessing, we three together, you and I and our son, Yanoula.

THEOPHANES. Where tarries the boy ? My eyes are hungry for him.

MYRRHINA. (*Calling*) Yanoula ! Yanoula !

YANOUЛА. (*Entering*) I come, I come !

MYRRHINA. We must be busy, Yanoula, fetching wood and water to prepare the evening meal. (*She goes to get basket, etc., to go to the forest*)

THEOPHANES. Come here, my son, Yanoula. (*Holding him between his knees*) Where have you been this long time ?

YANOUЛА. I lay sleeping in the shade, Father, dreaming that I dwelt in a palace in the city.

THEOPHANES. A delusive dream, Yanoula, sent by the Evil One.

YANOUЛА. I must go and fetch faggots, Father.

THEOPHANES. The faggots will wait for you.

YANOULA. You look sadly at me, Father.

THEOPHANES. Old men have sad eyes, my son.

YANOULA. My mother smiles at me when she loves me. Do you not love me ?

THEOPHANES. Too much, I think.

YANOULA. Can one love too much ?

THEOPHANES. If one so loves the things of this earth that one cannot sacrifice them for things above, then one loves them too much.

YANOULA. I don't understand that, Father.

THEOPHANES. (*Pressing him to him*) My son ! My son !

YANOULA. You are hurting me, Father. May I go ?

THEOPHANES. Go gather faggots.

MYRRHINA. (*Returning*) Come with me to the forest.

YANOULA. (*Going to her*) Why is my father sad ?

MYRRHINA. Because there is no oil to feed the lamp, nor any money to buy it.

YANOULA. I'll get you money, Father, I'll find a golden cup dropped in a thicket by a wayfarer, or the store of a wild bee's honey hidden in a rock ; I'll slay a lion with my spear, and sell his hide to the peltmongers.

MYRRHINA. That's a brave boy !

THEOPHANES. Fond talk !

YANOULA. At last you smile ! Hark ! I hear the sound of bells. There's a whole cavalcade jingling up the valley.

MYRRHINA. Some traveller coming down the pass.

YANOULA. Someone sent by God, perhaps, to bring money to my father. Oh, Father, it is a rich man on a white ass with golden bells. He has attendants with him. See, he alights, they tie his ass to a tree . . .

MYRRHINA. It is a strange man. Come, Yanoula.

[*Exeunt MYRRHINA and YANOULA*  
*Enter KOLÓNIMOS*

KOLÓNIMOS. Peace be on this habitation.

THEOPHANES. And on him who salutes it be peace.

KOLÓNIMOS. Art thou Theophanes ?

THEOPHANES. That is my name. (KOLÓNIMOS *falls on his knees before him*. THEOPHANES *raising him*) Do not kneel to me, friend. Kneel rather to the lamp of God. (*He indicates the lamp*)

KOLÓNIMOS. See where it burns ! The lamp, the lamp ! Ah, God of the Christians, hear my vow. Behold this gold, fruit of my merchantry, eight hundred shekels of gold. Hardly earned, O Lord, yet here I lay it before thee, dedicated to thy service. And if ever I set finger on a single coin of it, let me perish and die, and be burned thereafter in everlasting fire. Amen. (*Turning to THEOPHANES*) Ah, Master, Master ! forgive the stranger who intrudes upon your solitude.

THEOPHANES. The ways of the forest are free to all.

KOLÓNIMOS. All day have I ridden among the mountain villages beyond the gorge of Pylæ, gathering money from my debtors on the farms. And as I rode down the pass, this bag thumping on my hip at every step, suddenly a voice spake to me from the earth or from the air, saying, "Another sack of misbegotten pelf! The time has come. Make restitution."

THEOPHANES. This was no voice, it was but the crying of thy repentance.

KOLÓNIMOS. Verily it was the voice of one of God's angels that spake, for suddenly at that moment in an opening of the trees I espied the roof of your hermitage. Oh, I knew it full well. Then I understood the voice, and straightway came I here. A hundred times had I heard the tale of the Saint and the famous lamp.

THEOPHANES. Call me not saint, brother, lest you lead me into the sin of pride, of all sins the most hateful in the eyes of Heaven.

KOLÓNIMOS. Yet in the city they call you saint.

THEOPHANES. So they speak of me in the city.

KOLÓNIMOS. Your name is on the lips of everyone. All have heard of your ceaseless vigil, keeping your lamp alight. But in these latter days since the olive-trees have been

smitten the rumour has come how your store of oil is running out, and men say—If he be a saint the Lord will give him oil.

THEOPHANES. It is but the truth. I have no money, no oil, the flame must die. Yet bid them leave my name in peace. I seek only the obscurity that becomes a man dedicated to heaven. What is thy faith ?

KOLÓNIMOS. The faith of a coward.

THEOPHANES. That is no faith.

KOLÓNIMOS. In Antioch the most fervent worshipper of the pagan gods, devoutest and most bountiful in the festivals ; but in my heart of hearts a worshipper of the true and living God of the Christians.

THEOPHANES. There is but one way . . .

KOLÓNIMOS. No, no, leave it unspoken ! If the price of salvation is to declare my faith openly, then I cannot be saved.

Master, I am a rich man, dwelling in a fine house with delicately nurtured wives and little children. If I declare my faith, then I must lose all my riches and my wives and children, whom I love above all else . . .

THEOPHANES. God does not ask it of all his servants that they should renounce their wealth. One may be a merchant and yet a good citizen.

KOLÓNIMOS. Ah, Master, I have not told you all.  
(*He falls on his knees*)

THEOPHANES. Who art thou ?

KOLÓNIMOS. The greatest sinner in Antioch.

THEOPHANES. Rise, fellow-sinner, on what errand art thou come ?

KOLÓNIMOS. To make restitution to God.

THEOPHANES. For what wrong ?

KOLÓNIMOS. For wrong daily committed on his people. Master, here behold the most unhappy man in Syria, one who does evil all day, and repents in bitter tears at night, praying to God for forgiveness, yet returning again at sunrise to his wickedness. At last it has become more than I can bear, and I have come to seek salvation by thy help.

THEOPHANES. What is thy name ?

KOLÓNIMOS. An ill name, Master. I am Kolónimos, the Merchant.

THEOPHANES. What, the trafficker in flesh and blood ?

KOLÓNIMOS. The slave-dealer, no other.

THEOPHANES. Much evil hast thou done to the children of God !

KOLÓNIMOS. And bitterly repented.

THEOPHANES. What wouldest thou with me ?

KOLÓNIMOS. Save me from the fires of hell.

THEOPHANES. Renounce thy calling.

KOLÓNIMOS. Ah, Master, would I not renounce it if I could ? Yet I cannot. I am not ripe for it. The hill of heaven is not climbed at one stride.

THEOPHANES. Have I not renounced the world ?

KOLÓNIMOS. Oh, Master, that is for saints like you ; but the rest of us are of the world ; the business of the world must go on ; yet can we not all be cast into imperishable fire. Who can be a Christian in business ? My father and grandfather were slave-dealers, and my son after me ; who can escape the wheels of life ?

THEOPHANES. There is no other way.

KOLÓNIMOS. Do not bid me despair. If I cannot quite escape the wrath of God yet surely I can assuage it. His wrath, may it not be appeased, if not quite quenched, with gifts and sacrifice ?

This is the purpose of my coming. See, here is money. I have set aside this bag of gold for the service of God, vowing never to touch it again. Eight hundred golden pieces . . .

THEOPHANES. Oh, what is that to me ?

KOLÓNIMOS. Do not refuse me, Master. It is a plan I have cherished since first the pilgrims talked of the lamp and of your steadfastness and poverty. What service can I better render to God, I thought, than to carry my money to the holy man for a perpetual endowment to buy oil for the lamp . . .

THEOPHANES. (*Rather to himself*) Is it God or Satan who has sent thee here ? For the lamp, say you ?

KOLÓNIMOS. For the lamp.

THEOPHANES. Oh, wonderful, most wonderful !

Praised be the Lord who answers the prayers of his servants with miracles . . . (*To himself*) But a slave-dealer . . . Christian slaves . . . the lamp no longer mine . . .

KOLÓNIMOS. You will take it. For my soul's sake, accept. With these you might feed a hundred lamps. . . . I will bring more, month by month a bag of gold. Take them in your hand.

THEOPHANES. (*Thrusting the gold from him*) No !

Your gold shall never feed my lamp. The smoke of the flame ascending to heaven would bear with it the tears and lamentations of mothers torn from their children in the market-place. The smoke of my lamp shall never go up save with the savour of sacrifice.

KOLÓNIMOS. Ah, be merciful, master ! Have pity on a man pursued by the vengeance of God. (*Casting his bag upon the altar*)

THEOPHANES. I'll sweep it from the altar. (*Doing so*) Take back your gold ! (*Throwing it at KOLÓNIMOS' feet*)

KOLÓNIMOS. I cannot, it is sworn.

THEOPHANES. The Lord will not take offerings from unclean hands.

KOLÓNIMOS. Then purify the gift, Master. Take it, it is thine, and offer it thyself to God, and so fulfil my vow . . . and thine.

THEOPHANES. I take no alms.

KOLÓNIMOS. No alms ? Then let it be in the way of trade, and make the money thine. Sell me some charm or philtre to restore the waning lustiness of youth . . .

THEOPHANES. I am no juggler . . .

KOLÓNIMOS. Some trifle, some bauble ; only take my money.

THEOPHANES. I have naught to sell. (*Enter YANOULA, carrying wood*) How now, Yanoula !

YANOULA. My mother bade me bring the faggots for the fire. (*Passes on into the hut*)

KOLÓNIMOS. (*The spirit of the slave-dealer awaking in him*) Ha, who is that boy ? Your son ? (*To himself*) Well-favoured and fair-haired, a rarity much treasured by the princes now.

THEOPHANES. Take back your money and be gone.

KOLÓNIMOS. How say you you have naught to sell ?

THEOPHANES. What mean you ?

KOLÓNIMOS. This boy.

THEOPHANES. My son ?

KOLÓNIMOS. He would fetch much money in the market-place.

THEOPHANES. I barter not in flesh and blood.

KOLÓNIMOS. His fortune would be made. Bought by some rich Pasha, trained in his citadel among the women, he would grow fat

and beautiful. . . . The Pasha would give him to the Sultan at the festival, the Sultan would make him a Captain of Janissaries, or one of the bodyguard, while you condemn him to grow up a savage of the woods.

THEOPHANES. Peace ! I love him too well to part with him.

KOLÓNIMOS. Ah, Saint, you still have some human frailties ? Do you love your son more than God ? What, the lamp like to die, and your vow to be broken, and yonder gold there might buy all, if it were sweetened by such a sacrifice . . .

THEOPHANES. Go, Satan, go your ways ! God would not ask it of me.

KOLÓNIMOS. Yet God asked Isaac of Abraham, and Abraham grudged him not.

THEOPHANES. (*Looking up to heaven*) Out of the mouth of the unbeliever hast thou reproached me, O Lord.

KOLÓNIMOS. And in return you would have gold, gold to buy oil enough to burn a hundred lamps to the honour of your God. See this bag of shining golden pieces. All are yours. . . .

THEOPHANES. Ah . . .

KOLÓNIMOS. See each round and full, enough to buy a year's nurture for the lamp. When you are dead and gone it shall be still yours, for your successors for many generations to

keep still burning to your glory. Who knows but in the days of our great-grandchildren thousands of pilgrims may still come to worship here at the shrine of St Theophanes? . . . Who knows? A marble shrine, a college of priests still nourishing the holy flame . . .

THEOPHANES. Let me see them, let me handle them, sin though it be. . . . A twelvemonth each . . . Ah, if for their sake, for the sake of heaven, I should sacrifice the last remnant of my joy . . .

KOLÓNIMOS. An earthly joy. Your God will reward you with a hundred sons in heaven.

THEOPHANES. It is the will of God. (*Turning to the altar*) Even as Abraham gave up his son, I will give mine.

(YANOUЛА comes out from the inner room of the hut, and goes to THEOPHANES)

KOLÓNIMOS. Give me the boy.

THEOPHANES. No, no! Not now, let him stay here till the morning.

(YANOUЛА clings to him, frightened)

KOLÓNIMOS. So be it.

THEOPHANES. And the money?

KOLÓNIMOS. Keep it. A saint will not deceive me. My messengers shall be with you at the dawn. Farewell. [Exit KOLÓNIMOS

THEOPHANES. (*Taking YANOUЛА, who is crying, in his arms*) Ah, Yanoula, mine, mine only till the dawn. (*Sees MYRRHINA approaching;*

*kissing YANOULA*) Thy Mother comes. Run, my son, run and wash thy face in water from the well. [Exit YANOULA

MYRRHINA. More pilgrims, rich men on jingling asses ? The glory grows. (*Noticing the scattered coins*) What, money ? Golden pieces ? What miracle is here ? Ah, Theophanes (*Kissing his hands*), a saint is known by the answer to his prayers.

THEOPHANES. Heaven is not secured by miracles, Myrrhina, but by the sacrifice of earthly joys. When we sought anon for a means to feed the lamp we found none.

MYRRHINA. There was none to find.

THEOPHANES. Our eyes were blinded by sin. One last sacrifice we had to make, and on that I have resolved for both of us.

MYRRHINA. What sacrifice ? What can you mean ?

THEOPHANES. Yanoula !

MYRRHINA. Our son, Yanoula ! Ah, the rich man ? The money ? You have sold him ? No, no, say it is not true. It cannot be true ! You ? You are jesting, you say it to try my faith ?

THEOPHANES. It is true.

MYRRHINA. What, my child, the child of my body, I that made him, bare him, nourished him ! . . . No, no, Theophanes, you are mocking me.

THEOPHANES. I have said.

MYRRHINA. What, for a lamp ?

THEOPHANES. God's lamp.

MYRRHINA. No, no. The sun of my sky, the moon of my night, for a smoky flame ? My child, my life, God's special voice to me ? No. My eyes are opened now. The voice of life speaks in me, drowning the murmurs of your sullen creed.

This world was made for happiness. The sunshine and the trees, the singing birds and water running joyfully, these are the true symbols of God on earth, not lamps that smoke in the dark corners of hermit caves and huts. When I defied my father and left my home, I chose you for your manly courage, not for your gloomy faith ; when I left the city and followed you to the forest it was to seek the true and simple happiness of life, and not to say to sorrow : " Be my joy."

I thought you wise, and I made you steersman of my soul, but now I see you are close driving upon the rocks I take the helm.

I will not sell my son.

THEOPHANES. Self-seeking mother ! Would you have your son grow up a savage of the woods, when he might be, who knows, a great man, the Sultan's favourite.

MYRRHINA. He would be a slave, a plaything of the Sultan's women. No, no, the merchant

would never be so cruel, he would have given alms for our poor lamp.

THEOPHANES. I would not have his alms.

MYRRHINA. He offered alms ?

THEOPHANES. Yea, and at first I rejoiced, seeing my vow likely to be fulfilled. Then I bethought me of what time I go to heaven, and stand at last before the Throne of Grace, lamp in hand, and God saying : “ Well done, good and faithful servant, Theophanes, who kept the lamp burning.” Must I then confess with shame, though it was my hand that tended the lamp, yet was it Kolónimos, the slave-dealer, who fed it with oil.

MYRRHINA. Ah, now at last my eyes are opened indeed. All these years I have been happy with you, gloried in you, and now I see I gloried in a sham. Not an unwise saint only, but a vain and selfish saint. Always my life has been thrown away on you ; I have lived in the reflected glory of a man’s pride and vanity. But I do not regret it since it has led to my understanding the meaning of life at last. (*YANOULA comes to the door of the hut and stands listening*) The merchant shall never have my son.

THEOPHANES. He sends for the boy at dawn.

MYRRHINA. He shall never have him. You who think the world a marsh of steaming sin, would yet plunge your son into it, for what ?

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Not to keep the lamp alight, but only that you may boast in heaven: "I and I only kept the flame burning." Ah, now I see! Your saintliness has been a snare, hurling you down to the lowest creeping vice of vanity.

THEOPHANES. I have lived humbly, rejecting honour.

MYRRHINA. Trapped out in rags, your humbleness was nothing but pride disguised; your hermitage was as much a vanity as the gold-minareted palace of a sultan. . . . Yet I love you, Theophanes, and would save you. There is only one way. We must fly from this place, and go where no man knows you. (*Imploring him*) Come. (*Yet more imploringly*) Come.

THEOPHANES. But I have received the money.

MYRRHINA. The merchant is but in the wood, his ass is lame. I will go after him and restore it to him.

(YANOULA goes over to his mother and takes her hand)

THEOPHANES. And the lamp?

MYRRHINA. It is the lamp that made you sin. Let it go out. God's lamps are lighted not in bowls of earthenware, but in the hearts of men.

THEOPHANES. What, my vow, my life's work come to naught? Never! Go if you will, but I am resolved.

MYRRHINA. (*Turning to YANOULA, taking both his hands, and gazing deep into his eyes*) Will you, Yanoula, stay with him or come with me, to wander and roam, and live as best we may about the world?

YANOULA. With you.

THEOPHANES. Give me the boy.

MYRRHINA. (*Putting her arms round YANOULA*) Never! He is mine!

THEOPHANES. Do as I bid you.

MYRRHINA. Never! (*Pause. Then, leaving YANOULA, crossing to THEOPHANES and putting her hands on his shoulders, again implores him*) Come, choose in time, Theophanes, your happiness in this world and in the next rests upon your choice. Will you fly with us (*Pause*), or will you stay?

(*THEOPHANES hesitates, struggling with himself; then, thrusting her from him, leaving her near the altar, he walks to the centre front of the stage*)

THEOPHANES. I stay.

MYRRHINA. (*Striking down the dying lamp*) Then out, lamp! (*To THEOPHANES*) Stay.

[*Exeunt MYRRHINA and YANOULA*  
(*The man stays with the money about him, and the lamp broken, weeping*)

CURTAIN

# LONGING

*A Subjective Drama in Two Scenes*

“*La vida es sueña*”

## CHARACTERS

THE MAN  
THE MAN'S MOTHER  
MARGARET  
TOM  
THE DOCTOR  
DEATH  
VANITY  
THE VOICE  
THE COLONEL  
WHISPERERS  
PHANTOMS  
CHILDREN  
THE CHILD

# LONGING

## SCENE I

*Night. A bedroom. A candle stands on the table by the bed. Fire-place at the back. MARGARET is dimly seen standing; her hand rests on the mantelpiece; she is looking round, following the MAN with her eyes. The MAN is in his shirt-sleeves, packing. He takes no notice of her. She is only a vision.*

MAN. Margaret ! Margaret ! It is like a tooth-ache going on and on in one's mind. One cannot bear it for ever. I feel that my brain is changed, my body is changed. Night after night, never to sleep; never to sink right away; but always nightmares and passionate thinking of her. To get up haggard and begin again. After all, life is the chief thing; to keep from going mad is the chief thing. I want to eat and drink and sleep, to use my muscles. Action's the only way; always to be doing something with my hands. I couldn't sit in an office and read papers; my eyes passed over the words; my mind was away, climbing up and up, like a prisoner on a treadmill. Thank God, I shall be gone tomorrow. She'll hear I've gone and feel a brute. Good-byes are nonsense. (*Packing a pile of shirts*) I love *things*; to handle things,

the smell of things. I love the smell of new shirts, the soft cool feeling of them, like a clean baby. And counting things ; to say five and see five things ; that's ripping. The 'new name tabs look like healthy sensible people. Thank God there's a mechanical side to life ! And once I'm in Canada I shall have quite new things to do ; the air will smell different, and the bread. I shall have to think where to put things away in new houses ; and out of doors the perpetual effort and exercise ; danger too, I hope. That all helps. Her image'll get fainter and fainter. But it's like turning into someone else, some inferior person. Don't let's think about it. . . . How her eyes looked through one ! The saddest things, when you come to think of it, that anyone ever saw in the world ; but exhilarating like sad music, like Russian music ; mocking too, mocking at something all the time ; and quite lonely, quite contented to be lonely ; as if *she* were life, real life, and we were only accidents. In time some other man will have her, some great wonderful man, when I've half forgotten her. She'll be conquered, be made like other women, have babies and get tired. That's a revenge ! Yes, I want revenge for all that longing. (*Taking a pistol-case*) How ripping the smell of new leather is ! So fresh and innocent,

and yet so vigorous too. Let's have a look at the pistol again. (*Taking it out*) I love mechanical things. There was a little pump I had as a kid. All the simple ingenuity, and the neat workmanship, and the oiliness. Her sewing machine, that's oily too. How exquisite she looked, every curve of her, as she sat bending over it, watching the stitches; and the curve of her hair in profile . . . (*Cocking the pistol*) That's the way she throws her head back when she's startled; not frightened; she's never frightened.

*Enter the MAN'S MOTHER*

MOTHER. Can I help you, dear?

MAN. No, thanks, Mother; I'm getting on all right.

MOTHER. What's that? A pistol? Do you have to have a pistol out there?

MAN. You never know in those out-of-the-way places. It's part of the kit. (*Gently lowering the hammer*) Now she's kneeling down to pray. Stay there and pray for me.

MOTHER. Do be careful with it, Albert; don't go and shoot yourself by mistake.

MAN. All right! Don't you be nervous. I'm not a smug; not clumsy.

MOTHER. Oh, is it too late to change your mind? Put it off for a few days at any rate.

MAN. You know I can't. The ship goes at eight. Drayton will be here at five.

MOTHER. I've told Amy to call me at four. We shan't have many hours' sleep. It's all been so sudden.

MAN. You'd better go to bed.

MOTHER. Oh, why don't you tell me things like Tom does ? I know that this Miss Bettany's at the bottom of it.

MAN. It's no good, Mother, I can't talk about things. Tom's different. I would if I could, my dear old Mother, but I simply can't. I've as much as I can bear. Guess what you like.

MOTHER. Why can't you fall in love like other people do ? She's not the only girl in the world. But you were always like that. If you wanted a thing, even as a child, have it you must. You'd think of nothing else. If you wanted a particular jam ; and you weren't a greedy child either ; you'd sooner starve than take what was there.

MAN. Yes, I'm still the same ; I must have the right jam.

MOTHER. You take after your father. If there was a certain piece of music being played anywhere, wet or fine, go he would. He was too sensitive ; it ruined his constitution. I've known him stand at a turn in the road and cry ; a man crying ! because of the landscape ; because it was so beautiful, he said.

MAN. He was born with the gift of longing, the damnable gift of longing.

MOTHER. It made his life miserable, and it'll make yours.

MAN. Don't pity him too much. He was a poet ; he suffered, but it raised him to a higher plane. There's salvation in longing, if only you're strong enough to stand it.

MOTHER. But when I see you so wretched !

MAN. I haven't been sleeping well. It's time we were all in bed. I'm tired to death ; I haven't slept for nights. I shall turn in now and finish my packing in the morning.

MOTHER. Oh, Albert, if only you weren't going away.

MAN. You don't want me to go mad, do you, Mother dear ? Well, that's what'll happen. It's better to have a sane son in Canada than a crazy one at home, isn't it ?

MOTHER. My poor darling !

MAN. There, there ! You run along to bed.

MOTHER. Good-night, my pet !

[*Exit MOTHER*

MAN. Yes, that's what's the matter with you and me, Father ; we've got the gift of longing, the damnable gift of longing. You were a poet, and I'm a . . . God knows ! (*Taking up his pyjamas, and throwing them down again*) I'm too tired ; I can't wait. (*He lies on the bed and sleeps*) Sleep ! Sleep ! (MARGARET appears by the fire-place, comes to the table by the bed, and sits blowing playfully at the flame of

*the candle, making it flicker) Margaret, Margaret! Let me rest. I'm sinking, sinking down into peace; let me rest here on your bosom; let me rest. (The WHISPERERS begin to whisper. It is as if one of them reported some disaster and the rest consulted what they must do to remedy it. One by one children appear, and run wildly about with muffled feet. MARGARET disappears) What are those children doing, running about so wildly? When first I saw her they danced in beautiful circles; they danced as I wished them to. But now I have no control over them; they run wherever they please. And the trees that looked so green and beautiful are strange wild purple colours now. They have a threatening feverish look about them. They are closing in on me; they want to injure me! (The WHISPERERS debate the details of their plan) Always that sound of whispering, as if there were a crowd of people, all plotting something against me. What do they say, I wonder. . . . It's all a plot to keep Margaret from me. I search and search in every room, but I cannot find her. Everything is her; nothing is her; it is all changed. (A PHANTOM stands in the attitude of MARGARET by the fire-place. It has her figure and her hair) Margaret, Margaret! Come to me! Kiss me again on the lips as you did*

once in my dreams. Margo ! Margo ! (*The PHANTOM turns and shows the hideous face of an old hag with pointed ears. It advances towards him*) No, no ! It is not true. That can't be her. I don't remember that she was like that. I can't have been deceived all the time. Are you sure that you are her ? (*Other PHANTOMS, muffled in grey hoods, close in on him. They move slowly and keep pausing as they move*) What are these things moving ? Why do they move so slowly ? It is unkind to move so slowly. Are you all her ? Yes, you are her ! I thought she was different. Still, I love you. (*Wearily*) Yes, I love you all. But I cannot kiss you on the lips ; you have no lips to kiss. But still, I think I love you, for I have always said so to myself. . . . No, it is not you that I love. It is my pistol, my little (*Clear*) pistol ; it has a jolly little faee. The handle of it is like her wrist ; there is a curve in it like the curve in her wrist ; she has delicate slender wrists. You are not Margaret, my pistol is Margaret ; that is the name of my pistol. I am afraid of you ; that is why I said that I loved you. But I hate you, hate you ! My heart sinks at the sight of you ! (*They threaten him*) Go away, you hateful hags ! Margaret, Margaret, save me from all these great grey things ! Do not come near me ! Help, help ! There are too

many of them ; I cannot fight them all at once. I have no strength to run away. Have meray ! have meray ! (*They mutter at him ; their voices rise and fall in rhythmical waves*) If they touch me I cannot bear it ; if they touch me I shall die. (*A CHILD glides down from heaven. The muttering ceases. The PHANTOMS draw back*) Ah, I am saved ! I know what you are ; you are Death ! Yes, Death came in the shape of a little child. It was a little child that saved the world. Come into my arms, you little innocent child. You are what I loved always. (*Kissing the CHILD*) Margaret, Margaret, at last I have found you ! We will protect each other. No one shall touch me and my little child. (*The PHANTOMS surround them, muttering*) Ah, leave me alone ! leave me alone ! Do not touch me ! They are killing my child, they are killing my child ! . . . Ah ! (*He wakes with a shriek. The PHANTOMS disappear*) Still the same nightmares ! still the same nightmares ! My poor brain gets no rest at all. I am always longing and searching in my dreams. It is no use. Canada is no use. I should not even get to Canada. I shall never escape from this longing. I have reached the end of my tether. My brain is going to burst. It is better to die and keep sane than to live and be mad. That is more than I can stand ! To be

mad is the only real death ; that is death for all eternity. (*He goes and fumbles in his luggage. The WHISPERERS whisper excitedly, as if expecting some disaster*) Where are they ? Where the devil are they ? I put them among the socks. (*He takes out a parcel of cartridges, tears the paper and loads the pistol. One of the WHISPERERS begins to mutter ; they all mutter ; they shout*)

WHISPERERS. (*Shouting confusedly*) This is the end, the end of all, the end, the end, the end ! Quick, quick, quick, it will be too late ! Saved, saved, saved, this is the only way ! The noise, the noise, the fearful noise ! Firm in the teeth, grip it firm in the teeth ! This is the end, the end of all !

MAN. This is the only thing that can save me. Good-bye, good-bye. No, good-byes are nonsense. Go out, you damned candle ! (*He knocks over the candle and shoots himself. Dead silence*)

[*The next Scene follows with little delay*]

## FROM BEYOND

### SCENE II

*Darkness. A sound of busy rhythmical whispering.*

WHISPERERS. One, two, three, four, fiff, faff, fuff. One, two, three, four, fiff, faff, fuff. I've counted up to fifty, fifty, fifty-five ! (Laughing) He, he, he ! There's nothing in it, nothing in it ! (Very softly) Fiff, fiff, fiff, fiff, fiff, fiff, fiff.

MAN. (With a long groaning sigh) Ah ! . . .

WHISPERERS. Fiff, faff, fuff, is it, fiff, faff, fuff.

MAN. Ah ! . . . (Softly) I have slept, slept, slept . . . yes . . .

WHISPERERS. Fiff, fiff, fiff, fiff, fiff, fiff.

MAN. A troubled sleep . . . still the same nightmares as before . . .

WHISPERERS. Fiff, fiff, fiff.

MAN. Counting and counting them over again.

VOICE. (Softly) What do you feel ?

MAN. Mm ?

VOICE. What do you feel ?

MAN. Longing !

VOICE. What for ?

MAN. I don't know.

VOICE. You died longing.

WHISPERERS. Fiff, faff, fuff, is it ; fiff, faff, fuff.

MAN. Always longing, longing . . .

COLONEL. You'll have to get used to it, my boy !

---

MAN. Why have I always this pain in the side of my head ?

VOICE. That's where the bullet came out.

MAN. Bullet ? What bullet ?

COLONEL. Ha, ha, ha ! That's good ! What bullet ?

VOICE. You shot yourself.

MAN. It was the stranger that shot me.

VOICE. You shot yourself.

MAN. It was my hand. I couldn't bear it any longer. He was inside me. He said : "Let's shoot ourselves!"

CHILD. It takes some courage after all to shoot oneself. (*The CHILD has a sad voice*)

MAN. I killed myself for love. I thought it was only in books that people did that.

COLONEL. Only in books ! That's a good 'un !

MAN. Who's that ?

VOICE. It's only the Colonel.

MAN. He's a vulgar fellow. Are there vulgar fellows here ?

VOICE. Till you get higher.

MAN. How can I get higher ?

VOICE. Only by longing, by unsatisfied longing.

MAN. (*Despairingly*) Good God ! (*A pale light appears*) I see a light. What's that ? Isn't that the garden of our old house ? It is cold in the garden these evenings. The wall-flowers look chilled. (*The light turns red*) Isn't that a fireplace ?

WHISPERERS. Fiff, faff, fuff, is it ; fiff, faff, fuff.  
(One of the WHISPERERS tells a long inaudible story to the others. They laugh, "Hee, hee, hee!" A room slowly appears. A young man stands by the fire-place ; an old lady in widow's cap and shawl sits in the arm-chair, looking into the fire. In dumb show the old lady asks for a book from the table ; the young man hands it to her. She lets it sink in her lap and gazes into the fire again. The man lights a pipe. He can find no matches ; he speaks angrily about it ; he takes a spill. He looks round, smiling, and narrates something. Then they are grave again. The old lady takes off her spectacles and wipes her eyes)

VOICE. Do you see people ?

MAN. Yes, I can see them, but I can't hear them.

VOICE. Do you see who's in that chair ?

MAN. No ; who ?

VOICE. That's your Mother.

MAN. What's that she's got on her head ?

VOICE. Don't you see anyone else ?

MAN. I see a man.

VOICE. That's Tom.

MAN. He's got on one of my shirts ; one of my soft-fronted shirts ; I recognised it at once.

CHILD. It's a nice shirt.

MAN. They seem very dull.

VOICE. They are unhappy because you are dead.

MAN. I see.

CHILD. They were very proud of me.

MAN. What does all this mean. What are these things that are happening ?

VOICE. Dreams, dreams, dreams !

MAN. Do people dream when they are dead ?

COLONEL. You're sleepy, my boy.

MAN. What does that chap want here ? Nobody asked *him* in.

VOICE. He's everywhere.

MAN. There's that book-shelf I was making : I was always fond of carpentering.

CHILD. I was uncommonly good at it.

MAN. I never got it finished. . . . I can't touch it ! I can't get to it now ! Oh, God ! Why did I never get it finished ? Why did I never get it finished ? They've put it up without a bracket. It isn't even straight. Oh, why didn't I put it up myself ?

CHILD. What a careless man I am !

(*The Doctor has appeared in the room. He is young and shy. He sits nursing his tall hat ; he does not know where to put it down. He seems to condole with the old lady and the young man. They nod*)

MAN. That's Rumford, the young Doctor. He's a smug.

CHILD. I was just the opposite.

MAN. I've known him for years. I always hated him. Something happened. Some girl. Why does he keep fumbling his hat about ?

VOICE. He's shy.

MAN. How are you, Rumford ?

WHISPERERS. Hee, hee, hee !

MAN. Why don't you answer ? Silly swine ! What are they talking about, I wonder. (*The MOTHER hands the DOCTOR an inkstand. He thanks her, wraps it up in newspaper, and puts it aside with his hat*) What does he want with my inkstand ?

VOICE. That's a keepsake.

MAN. The ink's dried up in it, and there's a dead fly at the bottom. (*MARGARET has entered, dressed in black. She stands at the fire-place, taking no notice of the others. They disappear*) Oh, God ! That was the girl. Look at her wrists, how slender they are ! Oh, Lord, am I to go through all that again ? How I longed for her ; longed, longed, longed . . .

VOICE. You died longing.

MAN. I couldn't stand it any more. Oh, why must we keep struggling up and up, always longing, longing . . .

VOICE. Life is longing.

MAN. The Colonel has no longing.

VOICE. He isn't alive.

COLONEL. Gammon !

CHILD. Scored off him there !

MAN. Why is she so sad ?

VOICE. She is longing for *you* now.

MAN. She fell in love with me after I died !

VOICE. She didn't know her own mind before.

A touch would have done it ; a little boldness ;  
if you had taken her hand even.

CHILD. There's something thrilling in my  
touch.

MAN. Ah, fool that I was ! Fool that I was !  
I had happiness in my grasp and let it slip  
from me.

COLONEL. That's out of a novel.

MAN. I might have kissed her once. I see it  
now ! She weakened and threw her head  
back. I might have kissed her on the lips,  
poured my whole soul into her.

COLONEL. Too late now, my boy !

VOICE. You could have done what you liked  
with her.

MAN. (*Despairing*) But I never knew !

COLONEL. That's just where the joke comes in.  
Ha, ha, ha !

(*The DOCTOR and MARGARET are together. He  
is shy at first. He nurses his hat awkwardly.  
He puts it on the floor. He narrates something*)

MAN. There's a man with her. It's that  
damned Doctor ! She's talking to him.  
What's he telling her ?

VOICE. I think it's some accident he saw in the street.

MAN. Good God, she's smiling at him ! Has she forgotten me already ?

VOICE. Time passes quickly in dreams.

MAN. But she's still sorry about me.

CHILD. (*Sadly*) Heart-broken, probably.

VOICE. She'll get over it. She'll marry him in the end. He was always in love with her.

MAN. I know ; I remember.

VOICE. And still she will go on longing.

CHILD. For me ?

VOICE. For something beyond us all.

MAN. But I shall lose her then !

VOICE. Not in the least. You have her present ; you have her past ; *he* has only her future.

MAN. But that's all rubbish.

VOICE. (*Sadly*) Yes, it's all rubbish.

CHILD. I saw through that at once.

MAN. Margaret ! . . . Margaret ! . . .

COLONEL. Ha, ha ! He's got the whip-hand of you now !

MAN. Margaret, my heart's wild love ! Look at me, beloved, with your deep, lonely eyes ! Save me from this nightmare ! Let our two longings meet, if only to burst out crying together ! Margo ! Margo ! Don't talk to that bounder. Don't you hear me ? I'm here ! (*The WHISPERERS begin to whisper*

*softly. MARGARET gives the DOCTOR a cup of tea. She holds up a lump of sugar inquiringly)*  
Help me ! help me ! All shout at once !  
Margaret ! Margaret !

CHILD. Margaret !

COLONEL. Margarine !

WHISPERERS. (*Laughing*) Hee, hee, hee !

MAN. My whole soul is aching for you, my beloved. I must touch you, if only for a moment. Margaret ! Is she deaf ?

COLONEL. (*Chuckling*) To you !

MAN. I must touch her, I tell you. Let me go !  
let me go !

COLONEL. Nobody's holding you.

MAN. (*Moaning*) Ah ! I can't do it ! I can't do it ! (*Sobbing*) My knees give way. I'm all sick and flabby.

(*The WHISPERERS whisper with more and more excitement while he speaks*)

WHISPERERS. Fiff, faff, fuff ! Fiff, faff, fuff !  
A hundred and ninety-nine ;  
A hundred and ninety-nine ;  
And everyone was mine !

(*Quarrelling*) It's mine, I tell you ! Shut up,  
it's mine !

I'll break it in two !

I'll tell your Mother if you do.

A hundred and ninety-nine.

A hundred and ninety-nine.

MAN. I'm fainting ! I'm fainting ! Save me,

someone ! Help me to fight against this blackness.

*(The light grows dim)*

WHISPERERS. Fiff, faff, fuff,

COLONEL. Boomboll.

MAN. What ?

COLONEL. Boomboll.

MAN. I can't hear what you say. Oh, God !

What is the use of all this longing ? It tears one to pieces. What is it for ? What is it for ?

COLONEL. *(Imitating the Voice)* You died longing.

MAN. All those things coming to be counted again. I can't do it ! I can't do it !

COLONEL. You must, my boy, you must !  
*(Singing)*

Zig a zig zig,  
Zig a zig zig.

*(The WHISPERERS whisper the words to a jiggling tune. The figures of the DOCTOR and MARGARET bob up and down in time to the music, and then disappear. Laughter and whispering. A silence)*

MAN. Are you there ? *(A silence. Frightened)*  
Are you there ? *(A silence)* Good God ! Am I alone ? *(A silence)* Then a soft sniggering laugh. The CHILD and the COLONEL talk quickly and confidentially)

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CHILD. (*Softly*) There's a novel of Shakespeare's about a man who loved three girls at the same time.

COLONEL. (*Softly*) They've given up the *Quarterly* at my club. Dull paper, very dull paper !

CHILD. (*Softly*) It shows up the pictures.

COLONEL. (*Softly*) Marsden never could cook.

MAN. How can I count if you fellers keep talking ? Now I shall have to begin all over again.

COLONEL. (*Imitating the VOICE*) You died longing.

MAN. Mm ? What's that ?

COLONEL. Boomanóonoo.

MAN. Can't hear what you say. You're talking rubbish.

COLONEL. Antíndara.

MAN. Eh ?

WHISPERERS. Fiff, faff, fuff ! Fiff, faff, fuff !

MAN. (*Sleepily*) I don't know. I haven't time. Fifty-one, fifty-two, fifty-three, fifty-two, fifty-one, fifty-two . . . fifty-three . . . (*With a long groaning sigh*) Ah ! . . .

WHISPERERS. Fiff, faff, fuff, is it ; fiff, faff, fuff.

One, two, three, four, fiff, faff, fuff.

One, two, three, four, fiff, faff, fuff.

CURTAIN













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